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1932
VOL. LXXXIV No. 6

A. A. Proctor
EDITOR

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Cover Design by Hubert Rogers *Headings by V. E. Pyles*

Published twice a month by The Butterick Publishing Company, Butterick Building, New York, N. Y., U. S. A. Joseph A. Moore, Chairman of the Board; S. R. Latshaw, President; W. C. Evans, Secretary; Fred Lewis, Treasurer; A. A. Proctor, Editor. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Additional entry at Chicago, Illinois. Yearly subscription, $2.25 in advance. Single copy, Ten Cents. Foreign postage, $2.00 additional. Trade Mark Registered; Copyright, 1932, by The Butterick Publishing Company in the United States and Great Britain.

By Command Of

BY

ARED

WHITE

THE WARNING came in a disguised voice from the division post of command, a friendly tip from some considerate soul of the staff to the nearest infantry brigade commander.

"Watch out for Ambulance No. 2764. Hell's Bells is aboard and headed toward the front lines. In his sweetest humor this morning, and may poke his nose in anywhere!"

Telephones began buzzing from brigades to their regiments. Runners sprinted from regiments to battalions, whence another relay carried the warning on to the companies. The alarm could not have been sounded more expeditiously among the twenty-seven thousand men of the division had it been put through the division radio net.

Commanders of every grade hurriedly checked their outfits, their command posts, their personal appearance. Officers who had been up all night on patrol were roused from their bunks. Ordnance was gone over for vagrant specks of dust. Men in the enlisted ranks counted their buttons, examined the dubbin on their shoes and looked to the fit of their belts. Dice games and bunk fatigues in squad dugouts and kitchens were promptly adjourned. There was no telling where lightning would strike. The division commander might pop up in a brigade P. C. or he might suddenly appear in the dugout of the fifth squad of M Company.

But the cause of commotion did not once leave the ambulance that morning as it jolted forward through the sector. He was a squat little man with heavy jowls, a meandering waistline, and a flabby, very somber red face. His uniform fit him poorly, his overseas cap was absurdly small on his head, and his whole aspect was anything but terrifying if you overlooked the two stars on each shoulder and the fitful pout of his lower lip. He sat with gray-green eyes fixed upon the side of the vehicle, speaking never a word to the three officers who were with him, his two aides-de-camp and the Division G-3. He might have passed for a man asleep in his seat, except for the convulsive movement of his hands, which opened and closed as if timed to a cadence of a hundred such movements per minute.

When the ambulance reached the end of the road, the three staff officers leaped out and stood by while the division commander climbed heavily to the ground. At an impatient jerk of his hand, the party moved off at a smart pace. The fat little man's legs moved like pistons, though he wheezed audibly from exertion by the end of a hundred meters. By the end of a kilometer he was laboring through the trench network like a locomotive on a heavy grade, but without slowing down his gait. His

face was set, one hand tightly clenched, the other beating a nervous cadence with a riding crop against the leg of his crumpled cowhide riding boot.

The G-3 lieutenant-colonel led the way into a camouflaged forward trench that wound its way discreetly into the lee of a high round hillock, at the top of which an O. P. had been established years before. Once, long ago, the hill had been studded with young pine and carpeted in fern and briar. Now it was covered only by snags and roots which resembled the pin feathers of a plucked goose. Its surface was hideously pock-marked by the vindictive fury of high explosive tempests of months gone by. The hill was riding in a dead calm at the present moment.

For an hour the fat little man remained at the top of the hillock, with his eyes glued to an observation scope in a concrete shelter. He made no comment, though his fingertips flecked constantly at the nape of his neck. From time to time he emitted a sound that might have been a groan or a curse. The enemy territory, as far as his eye could reach, was a labyrinth of bristling trenches, set strategically over a rolling terrain. When he had finished at the scope he turned back in a dazed sort of way and bumped into the wall of the shelter. The collision stirred his wits.

"Hell's bells!" he grumbled. "Hell's bells, and they expect me to drive through that mess with this mob!"

The three officers, having learned when to speak and when not to speak, offered no comment. They trailed the little man in silence down the winding trail and back through trenches to the ambulance, where he climbed in to resume his finger exercise through the ride back to his headquarters.

RUMORS bred behind him and multiplied. Since they were livid rumors that could not be trusted to the telephones, they passed down the division grapevine, that mysterious system of communication which could put news into twenty-seven thousand pairs of ears in less than no time. The Old Man himself had been up the hill to look-see. That settled it. There was trouble in the air. Hell's Bells was getting ready to strike; about to unleash his olive drab thunderbolt against the enemy. He had a battle in the planning, and it would come as quickly as he could lay his plans, write out his orders and set the military stage. The division was to have its baptism of fire at last.

These rumors had a strange effect. Eyes gleamed with the fire of a certain grim enthusiasm. Strong men smiled, or laughed aloud in satisfaction, and clapped one another on the back. Taut lines on the faces of high officers relaxed. Action at last, the test they had prepared for. The fact that Hell's Bells had paused nowhere to inspect or question told them he had weightier matters on his mind. And it hinted, too, that he was satisfied at last, satisfied that this improvised fighting machine of his was fit for the test of battle.

"We're going over! The Old Man's been up the hill. The big show is on."

A new vitality stirred in the veins as the words were repeated over and over. Hell's Bells couldn't have gone up that hill for any other reason. For more than a year now they had lived by the exacting laws of the little fat man of the double stars. His commands had regulated their existence, guided the hard transformation from killers of mice to slayers of men. His edicts had told them when to get up in the morning, when to go to bed, when to shave, how often to bathe, how many hours they must slave each day, and precisely how well they must do this.

By command of. His name to that legend on the mimeographed page of a division order was the law of twenty-seven thousand men, the law that regulated thought and action. And once having written his commands he saw to the manner of their execution. His requirements were as final as they were arbitrary. He measured, according to his own notions, the difference between success and failure. The penalty for failure by an officer was relief from duty, a benzine board, release from his service; a fate that, strangely enough, set to quaking the stoutest war legs at mere hint of it.

Others there were in authority; the

three generals of brigades, the nine colonels of regiments, and under them the majors of battalions and captains of units. But they were dependent upon the division commander's judgment. A snap of his fingers and a brigade general was done, or a colonel, or five majors. Also there was the division staff, off in the shadows of the background, a busy lot who pored over reports and danced attendance. They were seen but never heard. They made their reports to their chief—a bunch of yes men, rumor had it. It was the supreme commander who dominated all.

The twenty-seven thousand men in the ranks had sufficient evidence of that. Their immediate officers were forever warning them; when a car came with two white stars in the red square on the windshield, they must leap to attention. Equipment must be kept scrupulously; every one must put every ounce of himself into every movement when Hell's Bells was about.

Officer casualties had been heavy of late, while the division was taking over for front line duty. On the march up, Hell's Bells had stiffened his requirements, grown suddenly more implacable than ever before, and more restless in his movements. On the march he had found a regiment in which there was universal shortage in the stipulated five per cent reserve of marching shoes. Men in one battalion lacked uniformity of packs. Men in two companies were observed riding like flies on wagons and rolling kitchens. A full colonel, two majors, a captain and three lieutenants were shunted summarily to the rear, headed for reclassification at Blois. Officers trod on eggshells and slept with one eye open while they prayed for the dawn of action.

"The subordinate must fear his superiors more than he fears the enemy!"

Hell's Bells had shouted this ancient axiom at his brigade and regimental commanders with a lashing intensity at every conference. They had put it into effect with varying degrees of enthusiasm. At these severities there had been no spoken complaint. A stoical logic prevented that. For all except brigade and one or two older commanders of regiments, this was a first war. War must have its exactions. The little man of the two stars must know what he was about, since on his breast was a double row of multi-colored campaign ribbons to proclaim his expertness.

Also, the division had done splendidly under his exacting guidance. There had been read at formations glowing compliments from the chief of staff in the United States and from a famous French general in France. These mighty ones had commented upon the division's smooth organization, its high morale, its stern discipline, its enthusiasm for overseas action.

Under the guidance of the little man of the two stars there had occurred the transformation of twenty-seven thousand raw recruits into a cohesive combat unit that knew its rifles, its machine guns, its Stokes mortars and its artillery. It could now supply itself efficiently, take care of its own sick, maneuver without confusion, render its daily truckload of typewritten reports.

There remained only the final test, the test of battle. The rising pulse of the twenty-seven thousand, the flush of excitement, the grim smiles and tense readiness were their silent answer. Officers felicitated themselves. They had weathered the storm, measured up to the exacting standards of their division.

"Hell's Bells is sending us in!"

The rumor quickly became a certainty. There remained only the formal combat orders. Those, of course, would require time. Organizing twenty-seven thousand men for a coordinated attack was not as simple as a command at drill. A time of attack must be fixed upon, a direction of attack and scheme of maneuver. Attack waves must be designated, secondary lines; company, battalion, regimental, brigade and division reserves held out. The artillery must be told when to fire over the infantry, and where, and for how long. Ammunition and iron rations must be distributed for the attack, dressing stations provided for the wounded, evacuation of the wounded organized as the attack proceeded on to its various objectives.

Each unit must know its part and must be prepared to carry out its mission in close liaison with the other units.

Planning such a battle was not the work of a few minutes. Even when Hell's Bells had given his battle scheme for the division, the brigades must get out their orders for their regiments, the battalions for their companies, and the companies for their platoons. By that time, the men at the business end of the bayoneted rifles would be ready to swarm over into the teeth of the enemy tempest.

But as the division braced itself for the pending action, there was no thought of long delay. Hell's Bells was decisive. The crackle of his voice had proclaimed that trait at conference, and the snap of his finger when something went wrong; the agility and stir of staff officers who went about with him, leaping from automobiles to open his limousine door; the crisp wording of those orders which had been their law this past year. They called him Hell's Bells not in disrespect but from his favorite epithet, with which he prefaced his remarks whenever stirred either to pleasure or displeasure. It was a *nom de guerre* that fitted him exactly, that perfectly satisfied the need of the division for a special name for such a commander.

HELL'S BELLS climbed out of the ambulance at reaching his P. C. A nimble aide-de-camp sprang to the headquarters door and pushed it open. The clatter of typewriters inside gave place to shuffling feet as junior officers and enlisted men of the staff section leaped to attention and stood solemnly until the little man crossed the office to his private quarters, into which he disappeared with a resonant bang of the door behind him.

The two aides hesitated outside his door and decided to wait until summoned. The operations lieutenant-colonel strode with a purposeful gait to the office of the division chief of staff and entered without knocking. The chief of staff was busy with pen, note pad and map, and continued his labors for some time without looking up. He was a man in his early thirties, with premature threads of gray at his temples, alert, well formed features, a thin, decisive mouth, and gray eyes that snapped vitality. While his spare body, of medium height and square at the shoulders, seemed to radiate a peculiar energy, the deliberation with which he wrote, the frequency with which he consulted the map, suggested a careful, thorough workman, and a man ruled by reason rather than impulse. His voice, low, decisive and without emotion, confirmed this impression when he looked up.

"Well, Havron?" he inquired.

"Got him back safely, Maskell," Havron reported. He sat down, tilted his chair forward and leaned across to the chief of staff's ear. "But I think the time has arrived, sir, to puncture his balloon."

"Relieved some more officers?"

"No, sir. Didn't even look at any one this trip."

"What happened?"

Lieutenant-Colonel Havron squirmed and lighted a cigaret.

"Well, sir, I'll speak plainly," he said. "I needn't remind you that the Old Man doesn't even suspect what it's all about. But what's worse, he's in a funk—scared through and through. In a way it's pitiful to watch him."

Colonel Maskell's alert eyes registered quick concern.

"See here, Havron! Did he make a show of himself before any of the brigade or regimental commanders?"

Havron gave a short, harsh laugh.

"Nothing of the sort, sir. As I said before he looked at no one going up or coming back. The irony of it is, they were all trembling too hard in their official boots to suspect anything."

"That's fortunate," said Colonel Maskell, sitting back with a vast relief.

The operations officer thrust his head across the table, as if stung by the other's words.

"Fortunate, sir?" he repeated. "May I say the only doubt I ever had of this outfit comes from the fact that it is scared of Hell's Bells! Scared, yes, straight scared. Maskell, I've seen officers tremble at his approach. I've known lieutenants to stand dumb when he asked a simple question."

"Human nature, Havron," said the chief of staff quietly. "They know he

carries around the power to relieve them from duty. Any red blooded man is more afraid of failure or disgrace than of death or the devil. You ought to know that."

"But that they can't see through him, Colonel—that they can't see he's nothing but a—"

"You forget, Havron, that you and I have gone to great pains to keep up the illusion of a strong commander. That's our job. What you say is merely complimentary of how well we've done our work."

Havron was silent for a moment, but not placated.

"Colonel, you and I have served together ever since Mexico," he announced in a milder voice. "You were my captain in Mexico, you are my chief here. I want to take advantage of that fact to bare my mind, unless you expressly forbid."

"Officially or unofficially, Havron?"

"Well, make it unofficial, sir. It's Hell's Bells I want to talk about, however."

"Go ahead, Havron, and unbosom yourself," Maskell invited. "Perhaps I will be able to set you right."

"We've been nursing this straw man now for over a year, Colonel," Havron proceeded at once, speaking in a low, tense voice that gathered feeling as he proceeded. "To put it plainly, Hell's Bells is a finical old dowager who contributes nothing to an overworked staff except complaint. All he does, or ever did do, is strut about and scare every one with his show of pomp, aides and gouty temper. You know as well as I do that the largest force he ever commanded before this war was a peace strength battalion of less than three hundred men—and his mind hasn't grown any since that time. He got his two stars because he was the right age, hadn't ever been in a jam with higher authority, and always did what he was told. Outside of a bellyache, a savage scowl on his fat face, and a growl, he's as empty as a rain barrel at Brownsville in August.

"Now that we're going into action, he's fussing and fuming that his military reputation is about to be ruined by an impossible attack by a lot of raw recruits. He told me himself that we ought to recommend withdrawal or retreat without firing a shot. The unhappy part of it is, he doesn't even suspect he's just so much surplus baggage. He really takes himself seriously, thinks he's another Grant, and ought to be in command of the A. E. F. The point I'm making, sir, is that I feel the time has come to do something about it. Isn't it our duty to let corps know? They'd relieve Hell's Bells in an hour after an inspector had talked to the staff, if you'd only loosen up, Colonel."

"And have a new general sent here at this stage of the game?" Maskell inquired pointedly.

"There's plenty of good generals, as the Colonel well knows," Havron persisted.

"That doesn't mean we'd draw one, Havron."

"But we couldn't do worse—and it's worth the chance, sir. Oh, I know your ideas of loyalty, Colonel Maskell. But I argue that there's a higher loyalty than that to an individual, a loyalty to the Service, to the United States of America. Unless you definitely object, I'm going to pass the word to my good friend Jolton, at corps. He'll get action out of G. H. Q. if necessary."

Colonel Maskell's eyes hardened.

"I forbid anything of the sort, Havron!" he said.

"But I don't see—"

"Let's not debate," the chief of staff broke in sharply. "You've had your say, now I'll have mine. We've got a division commander and we're going to stand by him. He's everything you say—but you overlook the fact that we know his ways and how to handle him. What you propose might wipe out everything I've done in the past year. I've built him up, given him the best in me. I've written his orders, decided his policies, formulated his training programs, covered up his blunders and let him shine forth in a glorious light.

"Out in the division, even the brigadiers think he's done it all, and that I'm nothing more than a glorified field clerk with staff eagles. I've even fed his vanity, flattered him, kept him in a good humor in emergencies, made him think everything I do is in response to his

thoughts. He has one excellent trait. He talks so much and so fast, and contradicts himself so often, that I can put anything into an order after talking to him, and he accepts it as an amplification of his own handiwork. I've even learned to sign his name so well that he can't tell the difference.

"Therefore, Havron, I've got a right to feel that this is my command—and having trained it up to the eve of battle, I'm not willing to relinquish it to some one else. A chief of staff who can't do what I've done isn't worth a hang anyhow—and let me give you this final caution. If you disregard my wishes in regards to a report to corps, you'll have me to reckon with, Havron! That ends our personal and unofficial confab, sir, and now you'll excuse me."

An aide-de-camp burst in as Havron was rising.

"Sir," he announced, "the general wishes the chief of staff to report to him immediately."

THE FAT little man was sprawled at his desk, beating a nervous tattoo on its top, his eyes staring dumbly at the wall. At the instant of opening the door, Maskell caught the abject demoralization in the general's pose and eyes. But at sight of his chief of staff, Hell's Bells pulled himself together and got to his feet.

"I've made up my mind, Maskell," he asserted. "There's only one wise thing to do and I'm going to do it. I'm going to insist that corps pull us out and throw that reserve division in here for the attack!"

The general glared at Maskell as he said this—a look that defied objection. The chief of staff nodded thoughtfully.

"It's some upstart's mistake," roared Hell's Bells, "putting us in the line and holding that veteran division out for corps reserve. I'll see the corps commander tonight and suggest the change. That will give us time to withdraw in good order without messing up the corps plan!"

Colonel Maskell's eyes sparkled briefly.

"Speaking of that, sir," he replied quietly, "has the General heard the story of the brigade commander who retreated last month? His brigade ran into a strong counter-attack, so the brigadier decided to withdraw under cover of darkness. He wired corps, 'I am retreating with my brigade in good order', to which he received the rather pertinent reply, 'Leave your brigade where it is and continue your retreat'."

"Enough of your impertinence, Maskell!" barked the general. "I brought you in here to give you my decision, not to tolerate your twaddle. That's one fault you have, a lack of serious mindedness. That's the trouble with the whole staff. You lack maturity of judgment—you want to go groping in against trained German troops when this whole outfit isn't even half baked."

"Pardon, sir," Maskell replied, "but our orders are very definite from corps—to prepare our attack at once."

"Maskell, are you going to force me to relieve you from duty?" bellowed Hell's Bells.

"That is always the General's privilege," the chief of staff said coolly. "But that would not save you the annoyance of another chief of staff, sir; and my only thought was the General's best interests. We should at least have our attack plans ready in event corps disapproves the idea of withdrawal."

"Yes, as a secondary matter, I'll agree with you on that," Hell's Bells agreed grudgingly. "But corps isn't blind enough to go against my recommendation when nobody knows better than I do the green outfit I have on my hands."

"Let me remind the General of the story I quoted a moment ago. There was a point to it, sir. The story happens to be true—and the corps commander in the case commands this corps!"

Maskell caught the quick gleam of terror in the little man's bloodshot eyes. Hell's Bells dropped into his seat and renewed his somber tattoo.

"In the General's behalf, sir," the chief of staff proposed optimistically, "permit me to sound out the corps chief of staff on withdrawal, and in the meantime we can go ahead with our attack plans. In that way the General will be fully protected."

"I've not forgot yet, Maskell," Hell's

Bells accused querulously, "that it was you reported this outfit ready for action, when I thought it should be held back another six months. It's my notion you've got your head set on horning into this war the quickest way possible."

"I had to make a decision in the General's absence at Paris, sir. Naturally, with outfits needed at the Front, and the others heading up on the run, I didn't want to suggest that your division, trained under your personal guidance, was less fit than the others."

"No, no, I understand all that," wailed Hell's Bells, "but they're rushing us all up pell-mell—and it isn't right to jeopardize a man's military reputation this way. The most I can say for this outfit is, it's as good as any outfit could be in the few months I've had to work in."

"Now regarding our attack plans, sir—" the colonel proceeded to business —"did the General have any special plan of maneuver in mind? If I may have your ideas, I'll reduce them to writing for you to look at."

Hell's Bells groaned and drew his map under his eyes.

"A tentative plan, mind you, a tentative plan," he fumed. "Just for emergency use in case corps doesn't yield to reason. Just look at this map! Penetrate to a depth of two kilometers in one day! Impossible, I tell you. Well, put out a thin line of skirmishers and hold out heavy reserves. If our thin lines make it, we can feed in others, and work the thing out by infiltration."

"But that would be a piecemeal attack, sir. It would be more economical of life in the long run, and far more likely to succeed, if we organize a powerful initial blow, penetrate their position at a favorable point, and continue on with a succession of heavy blows."

They argued long and earnestly, the chief of staff deftly leading Hell's Bells from phase to phase of the projected attack, plying him with questions, encouraging him to expound various theories of offensive combat. Under Maskell's respectful patience and deft encouragement, the general rambled on with his views and orders, conflicting decisions that lent themselves to the chief of staff's purpose.

"I'll put your ideas into an order," Maskell announced finally. "I'll have a draft ready in the morning—and then we'll be ready for the administrative orders."

"By morning," rejoined the general fretfully, "we'll be working on our withdrawal plan if corps isn't stark mad. Now remember, Maskell, I'm leaving that to you and I'm counting on you to represent my very best interests to the limit this time!"

"Your very best interests, yes, sir," assented the chief of staff. "I'll sound corps out tonight on your withdrawal plan."

THROUGHOUT the afternoon and night Colonel Maskell worked on the plan of battle. He had completed his reconnoissance and consulted the views of the other technical experts of the staff section—G-1, G-2, and G-3—all alert young lieutenant-colonels who had been trained at the Line School at Langres for their jobs. Though the order occupied less than two typewritten pages, every word of it had been carefully weighed when sun-up the next morning witnessed its completion.

Those two pages provided the detailed scheme under which the twenty-seven thousand men of the division, attacking with divisions on their right and left, would smash through the German lines to a depth of two kilometers. There were five slender paragraphs. The first mentioned tersely the strength and general disposition of enemy troops and the presence of supporting American troops. The second gave the minute of the infantry attack, the direction, the objective to be reached, and the point from which it would be launched—the front line trenches. Paragraph three divided the attack between the infantry brigades, and outlined the support to be provided by the artillery, firing over the heads of the infantry to demoralize enemy resistance. It also gave a job to each arm of the division special troops, and held a single battalion in division reserve. The two final paragraphs were technical minutiæ.

Sent to the brigades, the order would

be translated by brigade commanders into a second similar order, subdividing the battle among their regiments. These brigade orders, going to the regiments, would bring forth a third crop, splitting the task among the battalions, which in turn would issue orders to their companies and batteries. Thence, the order would reach the platoon lieutenants, who had to organize the men and lead them into battle, a battle that depended upon the lieutenants and their men, once it was set in motion.

But the whole plan depended upon the division order for coordination, for the central battle scheme, for the teamwork without which chaos would be certain. And Colonel Maskell's plan was a decisive one, a plan fit for a seasoned division, a scheme that provided an initial blow designed to overwhelm resistance. It was a plan that plunged a gaping hole through the German right center, since there were no flanks to be enveloped; a plan that could win only under the highest order of courage and dogged determination on the part of the men in the ranks, who must do the fighting. It reflected the staff's estimate of their mettle.

Colonel Maskell, making a final check with his technical assistants, took the orders to the general as soon as possible. The general's aides had been hounding the chief of staff since daylight for his report, and Hell's Bells was pacing his quarters in a fever.

"Well, Maskell, what's the word!" he demanded before his chief of staff was through the door. "What's the word from corps? I've waited—"

"The attack must proceed as ordered, sir," Maskell replied evenly. "I have reduced your plan to writing, sir, following your ideas closely. As you instructed, I've followed the corps scheme closely and hope I have succeeded in getting just what you want."

Hell's Bells, pulling himself together slowly, took the proffered orders and sketched through them. When he had finished, he handed them back.

"Go ahead, then," he yielded with resignation. "But I want a record made in the journal that I advised against it." He shook his head dolefully, then pulled himself erect. "But now we've got the final decision, Maskell, we've got to go ahead. Do the best we can with the mob we have to do it with. Get the staff together and we'll talk the situation over."

"Let me suggest, sir, that the General's time is far too valuable now to bother with details. You, sir, must keep a free mind, a perspective of the situation as a whole. I'll go over the details of your order with the staff. I only hope, sir, the General will be close to headquarters the next few days so I can have the benefit of your advice and decisions on matters of policy and tactics."

Launching the battle plan was only a beginning. There was endless detail to be looked after in projecting a first battle. Organization of the attack raised many detailed questions such as supplying the men once they were over the top, since the first day's advance might be followed promptly by orders for a second offensive. Artillery, food supplies, ammunition, wire communications, medical attention, reports and orders—all the necessities and impedimenta of a belligerent migration of twenty-seven thousand men must follow along over hills and swales in the wake of the red tempest.

Through four days and nights the chief of staff slaved at his desk, went here and there for inspection or conference; gave instructions, wrote technical directions, checked the handiwork of others. He worked patiently while the dark rings deepened under his eyes. He took no time for sleep, barely time to bolt an occasional meal. From time to time he reported in to the little man, explaining respectfully, putting major decisions in the commander's mouth for him.

Each day Hell's Bells went over the division, a staff officer carefully coached by Maskell at his elbow. But there was nothing tangible to catch the little man's critical eye now. Every one was on his toes. Eyes shone, cheeks glowed, there was snap and energy and confidence in every leg and shoulder. Men passed Hell's Bells without fear now. They saluted less stiffly, and answered his few questions in an easy voice. The fact that he was sending them into

battle, that he was out among them in whatever humor, told that they had won his confidence, measured up to those expectations and standards that had been written—by command of.

There remained only the feat of living up to that last command of his—the command to attack.

"The valor of ignorance," he quoted to Maskell as he returned to the P. C. at the eve of battle. He shook his head and groaned. "But they don't know they can't blame me for it—that if my wisdom had been listened to, we'd have been pulled out for another two months' training before going in. God, they'll be cursing me tomorrow for what I've sent them into—and it isn't my doings at all! And my military reputation—"

THE ARTILLERY preparation opened an hour before the infantry was to move. The two light and one howitzer regiments of the division's artillery brigade turned the night into a howling bedlam as their guns drove an avalanche of explosives over the heads of the infantry into the enemy's domain. The artillery preparation fire was fixed for a solid hour, a fire whose intensity was designed to flatten out German combat positions and ruin enemy morale. Ten minutes of this tempest was in the air before the German cannon caught up an organized response.

Hell's Bells stuck to his bedding roll through the first half hour of the bedlam. Then he got out of bed, stormed into his uniform and boots, paced off his restlessness for a time, and stamped into the chief of staff's quarters. His mouth dropped ajar, then closed with a snap at the spectacle of Colonel Maskell seated in his chair serenely smoking a pipe and reading the Paris edition of a London newspaper. The colonel rose with leisure, but politely, at seeing the division commander.

"What's the situation, Maskell?" roared Hell's Bells. "What's going on out there—what's the situation!"

"Will the General have a seat?" Maskell responded, moving a chair in place. "The preparation fire is well under way, with a strong enemy reaction. We've had no reports of consequence so far."

"Maskell," charged the general irately, "do you consider it your business to be sitting here reading a newspaper with this kind of a crisis on our hands?"

"Why, really, sir, it's the first breathing spell I've had in a week—the first moment in which to relax. I wanted to get my mind off the whole affair for a few moments."

"But I, the commander of this division, want to know what's going on!" stormed Hell's Bells. "I want reports—I want information. I want to know where I stand. My military reputation—"

"Pardon, sir," Maskell interrupted firmly, "I can understand the General's natural anxiety, but really there's nothing to report. The preparation fire will continue until daybreak. We'll get a report on progress when the infantry goes over. Later we'll get reports of progress, but it will probably be two hours before we hear anything definite."

"Two hours! Maskell, by some twist of the brain, have you lost sight of the terrible seriousness of this whole business? You act like you didn't know there was a real battle going on—men being killed—my reputation up the pole! This is a time for—"

"Excuse me, General, if I appear blunt, but I know you're tired out from your long planning of this battle, and anxious to see results of your excellent work. But you know better than I that your job was to train the division and give the men their plan. It's up to them now—chiefly up to the platoon lieutenants and their men to win or lose for us. There's nothing we can do here except watch out for emergencies. If the plan slips, we may have to furnish coordination, may have to throw in the division reserves. But beyond that our work is done. I realize how hard it is to sit here, seeing nothing, waiting for telephone reports. I've always regretted that the fine old days are gone when a commander could ride the lines on a thoroughbred with a saber in his hand."

"In those days, at least a commander's reputation was safe in his own hands," said Hell's Bells, slightly mollified by the colonel's patient reminder. "But there ought to be some way of

knowing what this mob's doing — whether it's fighting or running away."

"We'll have all that, sir. I've got liaison men out to keep the General posted. We'll have reports as soon as anything happens—but it would only keep us jumpy if we had a report of every platoon reverse that happens this morning. I urge that the General go back to bed and get what rest he can. You will need a clear brain for important decisions later, sir."

At the end of much reassurance and argument, the little man returned to his quarters. There he remained until his breakfast was carried in to him. After bolting this, he paced the floor for another half hour stretch, and returned to Maskell's office at the first rays of the sun. The artillery uproar was less violent now, but there was the ominous rumble of distant musketry, machine guns, trench mortars, small cannon and grenades. Colonel Maskell was busy at the telephone, speaking in an unperturbed voice with some one out in the front lines. His desk map was now marked in red symbols; staff officers and orderlies from the message center came in a constant stream.

"Everything about normal, sir," the colonel reported, as he finished at the telephone. "Our initial smash succeeded. Our infantry gained five hundred meters in the first hour over and are still moving ahead. Casualties, estimated from preliminary reports, run about three per cent so far, which is a very small loss, when all things are considered."

"Yes, and it may be that the advance means we're being led into a trap, Maskell!" Hell's Bells snapped back. "How do you know that the Germans haven't got some slick tactical trick up their sleeve?"

"Oh, hardly that, sir," Maskell reassured. "They wouldn't give up valuable positions and retire with heavy losses if they didn't have to. Also, I had a brief chin with corps. The divisions at our right and left are advancing successfully."

Again, the chief of staff induced his commander to calm himself and await developments. But the little man's impatience grew with the morning, until he paced his quarters, or raged at the staff for information, like a man beside himself. The attack proceeded smoothly, as such things are viewed by the division P. C. Midday saw the grim rush of men and boys into the tempest of devastating German steel, successful beyond schedule.

A mass of American bayonets had penetrated the enemy lines at a critical point, thereby forcing the whole German line to crumple and drop back to a depth of a kilometer and a half along the division front of nearly one mile. That left only half a kilometer to go, with the afternoon ahead and seven men out of every ten infantrymen on their feet. The artillery was working smoothly with successive concentrations on critical points, evacuation of wounded was reported satisfactory, the supply of small arms ammunition was keeping up, control was being maintained by junior officers, contact by higher commanders. More important still, the men were fighting with a fierce offensive spirit, even though they neglected cover at times and accepted losses that were too heavy.

The division staff sat tight, with a rising optimism. That coordinated fighting team of twenty-seven thousand men was driving sure and hard for a military touchdown. There was the promise that they would reach the line of high ridges that was their goal, at a minimum cost of twenty-five hundred killed and wounded, and in fine condition to consolidate and hold their gains. The veteran divisions on right and left were traveling no faster and leaving no fewer of their number writhing on the ground behind them.

At one o'clock the attack was a glorious success. By two o'clock, with the goal close in front, the division hung up against the final high ridges where the enemy had dug in with massed machine guns to hang on grimly. Reports of this crisis trickled in gradually from liaison officers. Colonel Maskell concluded at first that the right regiment of the right brigade, Colonel Smith commanding, which held the key position for occupation of the whole line of ridges, was massing its strength, gathering its reserves, bracing itself for a coordinated

and determined assault.

But with the lapse of time, he became inwardly uneasy. The fear came to him that Smith's regiment was allowing itself too much rest under cover, that it had exhausted its offensive spirit. In that event, division headquarters had a crisis to meet and meet promptly.

But he clung tenaciously to the division reserve battalion, fresh troops with which new impetus could be given at any critical point. That thunderbolt must be used only in the last extremity. Since there was no cry from the regiment for division reserves, he sent forward trusted liaison officers to make a report of the crisis. No mistake could be made in throwing in the last reserves. With its reserves expended, division headquarters would be little better than excess baggage so far as the battle was concerned.

HELL'S BELLS picked up this danger from an unguarded telephone conversation. His face went livid as Maskell reluctantly gave him the details. There was a momentary stark terror in Hell's Bells' eyes, a giving of his knees, then a volcano of passion unleashed itself.

"It's time for a firm hand here, Maskell!" he raged. "Hell's bells, I've sensed this laxity of command, I've felt I was being hoodwinked! Send in my reserves. Quick, Maskell, get that battalion moving in there! We're committed now and we've got to go through. If we lose now, I'm ruined anyhow."

"General, I only ask that you hold your decision—hold your reserves until we know for sure what we're doing. I'm expecting full report—"

"Yes, wait while my military reputation is shot to pieces, eh, Maskell! Wait and see myself pounded to pieces by inaction. I'll tell you what I'm going to do! I'll do something. Hell's bells, I'm going forward myself—now! I'll see what's going on—and I want those reserves shot in there ahead of me!"

"General, I protest. Your life—it is too valuable to risk that way. Your place is here, to make decisions. I implore you to reconsider."

"Stay here yourself—and smoke your infernal pipe!" roared Hell's Bells. "Take care of details until I get back—if I get back! I'll soon find out what's going on out there. Now you get the division reserve commander on that telephone and shoot him up there on the run!"

Hell's Bells marched from the room, sent one aide scurrying for a small car, the other for steel helmet and gas mask. His preparation for departure forward required barely a minute. Maskell met the emergency with prompt orders.

"Havron," he instructed the operations officer, "you will accompany the division commander. See that he does not unnecessarily expose himself. Try to keep him as far back from Smith's regiment as possible and return him here with the least possible delay." He turned to his immediate assistant and spoke *sotto voce*. "Major, go out and personally cut the wires to the division reserve. See to it that we do not regain contact with them until I give the word!"

With the division commander went Lieutenant-Colonel Havron, two aides, an enlisted chauffeur and two runners armed with rifles, all that could be jammed into the little car that jolted them in grim silence to the point whence they must proceed by marching. The din of battle rose in a sharp crescendo as they approached, became something more than mere noise as they set out on foot. Hell's Bells fixed the pace just short of a run. His face was set, his hands clenched. 77's plopped into the broken ground twenty meters on their flank. The aides flattened out; Havron ducked. But Hell's Bells seemed not to have noticed the explosion, and the others raced to catch up when they had recovered themselves.

They passed the jump-off line, emerged into open, fire-swept terrain. The ground was littered with dead. Wounded men were being carried to the rear. Litter bearers looked up from their burdens in blank amazement at the spectacle of two stars plunging ahead toward the fight. Hell's Bells, puffing like a porpoise from the exertion, pattered on, as if intent upon going straight to Smith's regiment in the front lines, the critical point of the fight at this moment. Havron, recall-

ing his orders, attempted to put them into effect.

"Please, sir," he pleaded, "there's a crater behind that little ridge. The General must take cover there. I'll send ahead for information."

But if Hell's Bells heard he did not slacken his pace. And he chose, rather than a discreet route where there was cover, the straightest line toward his destination. Havron saw too late the determination that fired his commander. Havron had counted upon a halt in some secure place well out of rifle fire. But it came to him now that Hell's Bells was moved by a greater fear than that of mere death, the fear of relief, of failure, the loss of his vaunted military reputation—the fear of higher authority.

Runners passed on their flanks, clinging to cover, zig-zagging discreetly. The runners increased their gait at sight of the two stars. A liaison officer caught the spectacle and moved forward from cover to cover at an energetic run. Even amid the stress of action, the grapevine caught up the alarm and scattered it. From the division P. C, half an hour before, there had come the tip that Hell's Bells was out on reconnoissance. Now came the unquestionable grapevine news that he was wading straight toward Smith's regiment in the thick of things.

In a shell mottled region under the slope of a low rakish ridge, Colonel Smith's regiment had been gathering itself for a final thrust. Men hugged the ground in shell holes, behind ground welts and under every available inch of previous cover while waiting the word that would send them forward again into the teeth of death. For two hours they had been gathering themselves, covering their position with a sporadic fire, while the regimental reserves trickled into place to give impetus to the final drive. The colonel, dug in close behind, emerged from shelter at the news off the grapevine. He had allotted another thirty minutes to preparation. Then he was going to attack under a ten-minute preparation fire from the artillery far behind.

He tried for wire contact with his brigade and failed. A second report came in. Hell's Bells was moving up rapidly, now less than two-thirds of a mile behind. Unbelievable as it sounded, the news was confirmed. The colonel made his own decision. His command went out to the battalion commanders. Attack in ten minutes. The artillery was called on for fire, a concentration to be placed at the top of the ridge simultaneously with the infantry attack. Other word went out, unofficial word—

"Hell's Bells is on his way up here!"

It reached quickly down through the battalions to the company commanders, to the platoon leaders, to the squads in the far flung assault waves. It radiated swiftly to the flanks, to the machine gun nests, the 37mm. gunners. There was but one meaning to it. The eyes of the division were on this critical point. And once Hell's Bells arrived to launch the attack with his own command, the regiment's reputation for initiative was gone. There was no reckoning the consequences of such disgrace. Men braced themselves. Officers, goaded by that strange phobia of war that is stronger than fear of death, leaped forward with frenzied commands at the instant for attack.

Two hundred upward sloping yards lay ahead, a seething inferno that claimed crimson toll for every foot. But the impulse that put the lines in motion did not spend itself along the hard route. That grim purpose to do or die, nurtured through a year of preparation of mind and body for battle, held under the strain. A furious red half hour and Smith's regiment held its last objective, a commanding key ridge that exposed a broad segment of the German left flank so that the remainder of the American right brigade was able to come up freely.

BACK at the division P. C. Colonel Maskell received the word of Smith's grim achievement, recorded the stirring success on his desk map, telephoned the corps chief of staff the glowing news, and turned his full attention to the left brigade of the division. Success at the right presaged victory on the left, which would end the division's first offense chapter in a blaze of martial glory. Re-

ports were meager from the left position, where Colonel Blant's regiment had waited favorable opportunity for the final assaults.

Maskell, while waiting developments, took up a diligent search for the division commander, who had not communicated with the P. C. since his departure. An hour passed before report came in from a liaison officer that Hell's Bells was safe in a shell crater, half a mile in rear of the point where Smith's regiment had attained the ridges. He had taken refuge there out of the German tempest only when Havron and the aides had dragged him to cover.

Now that the ridge was safe, the general was reported on his back, exhausted, though claiming that he was taking a brief rest and awaiting developments preliminary to a return to the rear.

But concern over the whereabouts and disposition of Hell's Bells was swept aside at the P. C. by the swift development of a crisis on the critical extreme left, Blant's regiment. The Germans had maneuvered the full force of their available reserves against that position. Their purpose in massing there was evident—a counter-attack in force, intended to yield them a fresh grip on the ridge. A German success as night approached at that point would enable the enemy to strengthen his position overnight and continue the contest in the morning. Serious consequences might ensue. Certainly the whole day's success would stand in jeopardy.

Deliberately the chief of staff sketched the possibilities on his map. With one brigade at its objective, half of the other infantry brigade advancing successfully, and his left regiment, Blant commanding, face to face with the disaster of odds, Maskell made his decision.

"Connect with the division reserves!" he commanded. "We're going to shove in that battalion now to put Blant over the ridge. Tell the commander to move in hell bent! There's only three hours of fighting daylight left, and we've got to make every minute count!"

For the better part of two hours the crisis hung like a pall of doom over the division P. C. while Blant launched attack after attack against the ridges. The regiment made progress slowly but doggedly in the face of heavy losses, while the reserve battalion hurried up to join the fray. Blant was fought to a standstill when the impulse of the reserve battalion was fed into his ebbing war sinews. A thousand fresh fighting men suddenly added themselves to Blant's assault waves as the reserve battalion drove against the hill. A thousand, added to the two thousand that were left of Blant's regiment, gave the power that was needed to sweep the hill tops. A short, sharp, crimson struggle, and the whole division was astride its day's objectives.

HELL'S BELLS arrived back at his command post shortly after sundown.

Maskell laid aside the mass of details that went into the reorganization of the division for the morrow and hurried outside at sight of the general's emergency car. He assisted his jaded commander to the ground.

"I've been terribly worried about you, sir," he said solicitously. "We've been telephoning all over the Front trying to gain contact. Glad you're safely back at last—and I want to be one of the first to congratulate you on the way your old outfit carried through today."

Hell's Bells walked gingerly on stiffened legs, but his voice was stout and vibrant, and his disposition normal.

"All right, Maskell," he rejoined, "but we mightn't be sitting so damned pretty if I hadn't shoved the division reserve in to help Smith just when I did! It's a lucky thing I jumped in just when I did. Hereafter, Maskell, I'll be wanting a little less of your advice. If I'd listened to you and held my reserves back—well, think it over and learn your lesson! And by the way, I've been thinking maybe I'd better put out a memo of appreciation to the regiments. Might buck them up for the next brush. Write something suitable—but don't make it fulsome, Maskell. Too much praise is a mistake. Now have something to eat sent into my quarters right away. I'm starving."

A staff car from the corps drew up outside the P. C. as Hell's Bells limped into his quarters. Colonel Jolton of the corps commander's staff got out.

"Corps commander sent me over, Maskell," the corps colonel announced, "to give Hell's Bells the chief's congratulations in person. Your ears must have been burning over this way the past hour. All sorts of nice things said about your outfit. The chief liked your field orders, and French liaison is enthusiastic over the way you held your division reserves until a real crisis. This puts Hell's Bells on the map, of which we're as pleased now as we were dubious a week ago. And all this doesn't hurt your cause as division chief of staff."

"Thank you, Colonel," said Maskell quietly. "I'm glad if I've succeeded in carrying out my part of the division commander's plan. I know the general will be delighted to hear the good news. He's certainly been on the job today, and deserves a good word."

"Sounds just like you, Maskell," laughed the corps colonel. "Pass all the glory along to your chief. You're notorious for your loyalty, Colonel. But aside from that, we're giving Hell's Bells credit for his backbone—and that's the principal thing in a commander. When I telephoned you the other day, the corps commander had practically decided to pull your outfit from the line and shove in his reserve division. You see, we got to fretting over a new division like yours holding the center—and we weren't quite sure of Hell's Bells. But when you spoke up and told us how insistent Hell's Bells was on going through, we decided to give him the break. Fact is, I'm going to mention this to him discreetly, now that it's all over, and offer him our apologies along with congratulations. Can I step in now?"

The division chief of staff paused to light his pipe.

"I'll take you in, Colonel," he said shortly, "but first let me warn you. Hell's Bells was mighty touchy about that proposal to pull this outfit out, and I insist that you not mention it. It'll spoil the whole effect of your felicitations to remind him of it now."

Farmlocked

By BERT COOKSLEY

Lord, if the hill winds would only be quiet,
    Only stop tumbling along from the sea,
Only stop speaking of schooners that lie at
    Rest in their pier bed, at home in their quay,
Only stop hinting of gray gulls that fly at
    Their laziest ease and mew endlessly.

Lord, if the North Star would only stop glowing,
    Filling my eyes with a white cloud of sail,
Sending my thoughts where the great hulls are going
    Out on the roads of the porpoise and whale,
Polished of deck and with crews that are throwing
    Leather lunged songs in the teeth of the gale!

Lord, if the valley birch wouldn't remind me
    Of masts that go scraping the edge of the sky,
If only the green of the fields wouldn't blind me
    With dreams of deep waters where white spankers lie—
If only I knew that a fair ship would find me
    After this plowing and sowing's put by!

SO-SO KROOBOY PALAVER

By ROBERT SIMPSON

BALLOCH, who was the African Merchants Company's agent-in-charge on their Benin River trading station, had gone up to Sapeli for a few days. And Dale, his senior assistant, had crawled into bed in midafternoon with a malarial temperature of 104°. But Donald Dow, the junior assistant, now virtually in charge of the premises, strolled along the waterfront before bedtime just as usual.

He had done this ever since the night of his arrival a few months before; and even the scrawny Kroo watchboys, with their squeakily swinging hurricane lanterns and their dolorous, tuneless humming, no longer paid any attention to him. Not that it would have disturbed him in the least if they had. For just what would be likely to disturb Donald Dow had occasioned no little debate between Balloch and Dale, who were his only white companions on the African Merchants beach.

Big, rawboned, careful and slow, Donald lived and worked and sweated with a kind of devastating precision, his lean, ever thoughtful face at all times expressing a gravely solemn doubt. Under stress he had been known to assert himself to the extent of deciding definitely that it was a hot day, or that the bottle of ale or beer which accompanied a dish of palm oil chop might have been a wee bit cooler; but these had been spendthrift occasions, when the crawling heat of the West African noon had made him reckless with decisions and words.

Now, as he walked along the waterfront beside the mangrove stick breakwater, into the silent blackness that lay beyond the isolated powder store, he glanced across the broad, dark, rumpled face of the swiftly racing Benin River at the faintly glimmering lights of a freighter that had arrived just before sunset and had run foul of a mudbank.

Donald's Kroo headman had told him that the dirty looking black hulled ship was the *Bola*. A gin tank from Hamburg, the headman had said she was. Donald had gotten just a hint that the Kroo headman and his gang of Krooboys did not like the *Bola* very much.

However, as Donald looked at her now—at the dim, somber shadow of her tilting drunkenly on the mudbank—she seemed to be just another cargo boat.

He paused there and drew back a step, looking sharply down at his feet.

Something black and crawling—something that had climbed over the mangrove stick breakwater out of the river—a nearly naked black man in a loincloth, sprawled face down, his feet still hanging over the top of the mangrove sticks.

Donald waited a second or two to see whether there was any movement in him, then stooped and touched him on the shoulder. Then he shook him; and presently he slowly straightened and called—

"Watchboy!"

The nearest watchboy, shuffling past the main wharf, stopped and turned his head; and presently the light of his hurricane lantern not only established definitely the fact that the unusual intruder was dead, but also suggested something of the reason for his death.

His back was in a nasty mess, all torn flesh and congealed blood from shoulder to waist; and whatever instrument had been responsible for this had not missed the head and neck. Obviously the man had been very badly beaten and had sought the river as a means of escape from further brutality of the sort; and the terrific strain of battling with the treacherously swift current of the Benin River had proved too much for him.

Donald did not make up his mind about it; he did not even try to. The watchboy was staring dumbly down at the thing at their feet and shivering as if a sudden chill had seized him.

"Do ye know him?" Donald asked.

"He be—he be from we country."

"A Krooboy, eh? Better fetch the headman."

The watchboy departed, with astonishing speed for a watchboy; and Donald did not have long to wait for the arrival of the Kroo headman, accompanied by a whispering chorus of Krooboys, who stared just as the watchboy had done. The headman looked something like the color of wet ashes, and his glance shifted from the dead man out across the river. Donald waited awhile, then asked—

"Well?"

"He come from ship, sah," the headman said thickly. "From *Bola*. He throw lead long time."

"The leadthrower? On that ship? Are ye sure?"

"Yessah. He be my friend. I savvy him long time. I go look out for bury palaver, propah, sah, one time."

"Well, now—" But Donald stopped there.

If the dead man had been the leadthrower on the *Bola* and the *Bola* had landed on a mudbank, maybe a word with the *Bola's* captain would be the best way. Yes, that would be best. It was the business of the *Bola* to take care of its dead in any case.

"Get out the gigboat. We'll take him to the ship."

"N-n-no, sah," the headman stuttered desperately, and every Krooboy with him echoed the protest.

"Why not? Are ye no sure about him?"

"Yessah. But trouble go come foh all Krooboy. Big trouble. This no be you palaver. Dis be so-so Krooboy palaver. We go look out foh him propah, sah. Yessah. Krooboy no want make trouble foh you, sah."

Donald listened patiently enough, and knew he was being asked to say nothing and do nothing about the dead Krooboy. Apparently the headman, and the other Krooboys too, did not want him, or any other white man for that matter, to give the occurrence a second thought. Not even a first one. For a reason of their own—doubtless a good enough reason from their own queer, black point of view—they wanted to bury their countryman and have done with him as quickly as possible.

But, of course, this was not a white man's way. Donald was afraid he had no alternative but to decide for himself what was the right thing to do with a dead Krooboy who had been a leadthrower on the *Bola*. He was for the time being the nearest representative of the law.

"Get out the gigboat. Wrap something around him. We'll take him to the ship."

OF COURSE, if Donald had been an older hand in the palm oil business, and better acquainted with the ships that dropped their anchors in the creeks and rivers of the Niger Delta, he would have known that there were ships and ships. But he had never seen the *Bola* before, had never heard of her, and therefore was not aware that her skipper, Captain Rackwell, was known from Conakry to Old Calabar as the Nigger Killer.

Perhaps, even if Donald had known this, it would not have made any difference. At any rate, there was not the slightest doubt in his mind about the *Bola's* responsibility in taking care of its dead.

This was the only thought in his mind half an hour later as the gig slipped alongside the *Bola* and he straightway began to climb the ship's rope ladder followed by one of his gig crew, a powerful Krooboy, who was carrying the dead man slung over his shoulder.

The Krooboy's teeth were frankly chattering. He did not like this job. Aside from all other considerations, he knew the *Bola* too well; and his orders from the headman had been to "look out propah for the small-boy white man"—meaning Donald, who was at least seventy-two inches in his socks.

At the top of the rope ladder, peering down at them over the rail, was a member of the gin tank's black gang; a squat, ungainly Krooboy with one eye. His name was Gronda. And he was the dead leadthrower's elder brother. Because of this, he had been held responsible for his brother's desertion of the ship in the approved Rackwell fashion; the same fashion with which the leadthrower had renewed acquaintance after the *Bola* had found the mudbank.

However, Gronda was made of more enduring stuff than the leadthrower had been, and he had been luckier about the head and neck, possibly because he knew more about the tricks of minimizing the effect of even a heavy brass belt buckle. True, his back was raw enough, and when he moved at all he limped painfully; but he was now, for purposes strictly his own, stoically standing watch at the rope ladder's head, waiting to see if his brother would think better of it and come back.

In Gronda's right hand was the inevitable hurricane lantern. His left was tightly clenched upon something he apparently did not want any one to see.

"Wha's matter?" he demanded thickly of Donald, then hurled some very rapid Kroo down at the gigboat below.

Some equally rapid Kroo shot upward from the gig crew, and Gronda's single eye suddenly popped wide and rolled white. A broken, wailing cry escaped him; a cry that died sharply before it had much of a chance to gather volume.

"You—you no fit!" he exclaimed desperately to Donald. "You no fit to bring him foh dis ship! Trouble go come one time. Big trouble! Cap'n go pop hell. He go kill me. He go flog all man. All Krooman foh dis ship go curse Gronda all time!"

Doubtless this was what the headman had had in mind when he advised Donald that the dismal matter in hand was strictly a "so-so Krooboy palaver." But, of course, the headman had never heard of the Covenanters from whom Donald Dow traced direct descent. Neither had Gronda. So Donald reached the top of the ladder, slung one leg over the rail and paused there, peering beyond Gronda and his lantern into the sinister blackness that ruled the *Bola's* decks.

Tilting on a mudbank against a solid background of mangroves, with dim shadow shapes scuffing about her decks like waddling wraiths, and the rank smell of trade gin and sawdust seeming to rise from her hatches as from a sodden sponge, the *Bola* was hardly an encouraging sight. She did not encourage Donald in the least. Not even the vague sound of a cracked baritone, somewhere on her upper decks, singing a ballad, had a friendly welcome in it.

A little furrow of annoyance appeared between his eyes. Then he flung the other leg over the rail and landed on the deck just as a curious, spitting snarl, somewhere beyond Gronda, seemed to object to the cracked baritone even more than he did.

Donald paused. The last time he had heard a sound like that had been

in a menagerie.

"You no fit to come foh dis ship!" Gronda protested again, as the Krooboy following Donald also reached the rail and began to climb over with his funereal burden.

Again that spitting, vicious snarl that threatened to swell out into a still more fearsome cry.

"What have ye there?" Donald asked Gronda. "What kind o' beast?"

"Cap'n go pop hell! Cap'n go flog all man! All Krooboy go curse me propah."

Just beyond the squat Gronda's left shoulder, glowing like yellow lights in the dark, Donald saw the eyes of the beast he had inquired about; and saw, too, that it was confined in a long, low built little cage. A closer look informed him that the animal was a glossy black puma, about half grown and apparently in a very ugly humor; probably intended for a Hamburg zoo. Donald hoped that the padlock on the cage was a good one.

"Gronda, *ach der Schweinhund!* Vare iss dot lide! Who iss dot mans?"

The thick, guttural voice was that of the boatswain, who, on a par with the *Bola's* deckhands, was a heavy and ugly bit of flotsam that had been picked up on the Hamburg waterfront. He scuffled and waddled toward Donald out of the darkness that lay beyond a companion ladder leading to the upper deck. Gronda backed away, muttering inarticulately in Kroo.

"Vat iss?" the boatswain demanded and came into the light of the hurricane lantern like a blond ape. "For vy you come here? Vat you vant?"

Donald indicated the burden his Krooboy carried.

"Your leadthrower died on our beach. Where's the captain? I'd like to have a word wi' him."

"Vat! Der leadthrower deadt?"

Donald turned to the Krooboy who accompanied him.

"Put him down on the deck," he said quietly; and when this was done he looked toward the boatswain again. "I said I'd like to have a word wi' your captain."

"*Nein!* Der captain sleep. He break my headt goot if I vake him for dot." Then, with a disgusted look toward the still figure on the deck, "*Ach der Schwein* from a leadthrower! For vy iss he deadt to bring more trouble than alife!"

"Then maybe the chief mate would do?" Donald suggested patiently. "Is he on board?"

"Carfax? He iss der mate. Always he iss on board. Come mit me. I show you." He swung on Gronda. "*Dumkopf,* vatch for dis place goot or I flog you."

Gronda said nothing, but his knees seemed to be buckling under him. And when Donald, trailing the waddling boatswain up the companion ladder leading to the upper deck, paused a moment and turned his head, he found his own Krooboy following faithfully at his heels and discovered that Gronda was crouching beside the print wrapped body on the deck below, moaning and beating his chest and his thick, woolly skull with his clenched fists in a most fearsome manner.

THE hurricane lantern on the deck beside Gronda was searching the one-eyed Krooboy's face with flickering, uncertain stabs of light, revealing ugly flashes of his agony and his hate; and, off to the right, in its low-built cage, the spitting snarls of the puma seemed to answer each moan with something that might almost have been akin to sympathy. Altogether the thing made a gruesome picture—a picture Donald Dow was not likely to forget.

Puzzling a little, he reached the upper deck and followed the boatswain around a deckhouse toward a solitary light that burned beyond a ventilator aft of the saloon skylight. From somewhere in the vicinity of this light came the sound of voices and then the cracked baritone began again:

> "I'm poor, I'm proud, and I'm particular,
> I don't like work and never did—"

"Drink up and shut up," another voice grunted. "If you rouse out the Old Man with that croaking—Eh? What in hell do you want?"

The final remark was addressed to the boatswain, and the speaker, wal-

lowing in a canvas deckchair with a stein of beer on the deck beside him, was a fat, apparently jovial man, with huge ham-like hands, and forearms to match. This was Carfax, the *Bola's* chief mate.

A lanky, long armed, solemn and washed-out looking individual with pale blue eyes occupied the other chair. He said nothing and looked nothing. The boatswain and Donald and his trembling Krooboy guardian apparently had no existence so far as he was concerned. His name, though Donald did not know it, was Bolton, and he was the second officer.

Nearer to the rail, engulfed in semi-darkness, sat the second engineer, he of the cracked baritone. He was younger than the other two and obviously had been drinking something stronger than beer. He introduced himself.

"Hello, brother," he greeted Donald before the boatswain could talk. "Have a drink. My name's Brent. Brent, that's me. And I treat my friends right. Have a drink?"

"Shut up," Carfax said without bothering to look in Brent's direction, and eyed Donald up and down and around. "Where you from, young fellow?"

"The African Merchants beach."

"What's your name?"

"Dow."

"Dow? Bow-wow—Dow." Carfax laughed, and Donald noticed that he had little eyes that disappeared into rolls of fat when he laughed like that. "One of Balloch's men, eh? What did Balloch send you on board the *Bola* at this time of night for? Don't he know we don't like you fellows snooping around after dark on this ship?"

Donald considered Carfax's humor a moment before he answered. Then he said simply enough:

"Balloch did not send me. He's gone up to Sapeli. And Dale, the senior assistant, is sick."

"Well? What do you want me to do about it? Hunh? You're new out here, ain't you? Have I seen you before?"

"No."

"No, what?"

"You've never seen me before."

Brent, the second engineer, laughed. Carfax's heavy joviality clouded over. Bolton, the colorless looking second officer, did and looked nothing at all.

"I know that much," Carfax grunted. "But say sir when you talk to me."

Donald looked directly at Carfax; much more steadily than Carfax liked. So the chief mate snapped at the boatswain—

"What's the trouble?"

"He—he say der *Schwein* from a leadthrower is deadt on his beach. He bring deadt man for the ship."

"What's that?" Carfax came out of the deckchair faster than one would have expected him to. Even Bolton, the second officer, sat up. "The leadthrower!" Carfax took a long breath then swung on Donald. "What in hell do you mean by bringing a dead nigger on to this ship!"

"He's your leadthrower," Donald said quietly. "I found him dead on our beach. And I brought him back to you."

"You're a crazy liar! He don't belong here. Who told you he did?"

"My Krooboys. He's a Krooboy, too, and they've known him a long time."

Carfax paused. Bolton, the second officer, seemed to uncoil himself to sit up perfectly straight, and Brent, leaning forward in his chair, laughed thickly and said:

"Let's have another drink. What's a lousy Krooboy between friends?"

No one paid any attention to this. Carfax's little eyes fixed themselves on the Krooboy who stood trembling at Donald's elbow, then he snapped at Donald—

"Is he one of your beach boys?"

"Yes."

Carfax's glance went sharply back to the Krooboy.

"You savvy dead man?"

"Ye—yessah."

"Why you say he be leadthrower for this ship, eh? Why you talk so-so lie like dat?"

"I no talk lie, sah."

"You lie! We no savvy dead man. He no be leadthrower for dis ship!"

The Krooboy backed away a step or two as Carfax belligerently advanced; but Donald interposed himself and asked quietly—

"How do you know the dead man isn't your leadthrower when you haven't seen him?"

"How do I know? How do I—hell! Do you think I'm going to argue it out with you or with this lying black swine you've brought with you! Get off this ship, and take that dead nigger with you."

Donald did not move. He regarded Carfax solemnly and gave due consideration to what he had had to say. Then, because the Krooboy who was with him had seen the dead man and Carfax had not, Donald turned to the Krooboy.

"You savvy dead man be leadthrower for dis ship?"

The Krooboy glanced fearfully toward Carfax and also toward Bolton; then his shaky glance came back to Donald, the "small-boy white man" he had been ordered to protect from harm. He knew he could not lie to Donald without contradicting the beach headman, and he could not tell the truth without inviting the combined wrath of Carfax and Bolton and perhaps of Rackwell, the Nigger Killer, himself. And then, from somewhere deep in his throat, there came the trembling guttural evidence of that Krooboy's courage and his loyalty to his own kind and to his daily bread.

"I—I savvy him. He be Gronda brudder. He be leadthrower for dis ship long time."

"You lousy, lying swine!"

Carfax's right boot missed the Krooboy only because the black expected it and was too quick for him, and Carfax's heavy rush to beat the boy to the deck with his ham-like fists was stayed by the flat of a large, long-fingered hand colliding as a buffer with his shoulder.

"Hold your hands!" Donald cried, not at all uncertainly, and planted himself squarely between Carfax and his victim.

The Krooboy made a queer whining sound, looked as if he might bolt, then flung himself from behind Dow and faced the enraged mate.

Carfax kicked at the Krooboy, got him in the ribs. And then something on the order of a miracle took place under the staring eyes of the boatswain and the second engineer.

DONALD DOW straightened. He took a single long step toward Carfax, and the flat of his right hand swung against the side of Carfax's head like a flail. Carfax did not expect this, and he was off balance and wholly unprepared for the left that followed it. The blows or slaps sounded like the reports of a gun, and they made Carfax's head spin so that the solitary light that illumined the scene appeared to whirl in circles. A second later, the long, hard bony fingers of Donald's right hand took hold of Carfax's fat face and threw it and him at Bolton.

Then with both hands and both feet Donald reached, rather than rushed, for Carfax and Bolton at the same time. The sole of his left boot sunk into Carfax's round belly and heaved him crashing against the rail; and Carfax, dizzy, sick and very much confused by these unscientific and unorthodox tactics, sat down.

And almost with the same movement, as Bolton, whose long ape-like arms had far famed boa-constrictor qualities, tried to fling those arms around Donald with the instinctive intention of crushing his ribs, Donald's right hand, still flat open, reached for and closed upon Bolton's scrawny throat.

There was no mistaking that grip. What those long, bony fingers took hold of they were likely to hang on to; and Donald shook the lanky second officer as a terrier might have shaken a rat; shook the wind and the fight right out of him, then picked up the limp and gasping remnant of what was left of him and heaved it bodily at Carfax, who was just recovering his breath.

Now he swung on the petrified boatswain, who had been too dazed to think or do anything that mattered.

"Ye'd better no stand gawping there. Wake up your captain before I lose my temper."

Brent, the second engineer, laughed uncertainly and came to his feet.

"I'm not in this," he assured Donald thickly. "No, sir. I'm out of it. And you'd better get out of it too, brother. They'll rip the ruddy hide off you for this. Chin-chin."

With a befuddled sort of admiration

in his eyes, he weaved past Donald and dipped down the saloon companion and disappeared.

Donald's Krooboy, pop-eyed with wonder and trembling with fear of retribution for this startling victory, was tugging at his master's sleeve. For the nonce at least he had apparently recovered from Carfax's forceful kick in the ribs.

"We go now, sah. Plenty trouble go come foh dis. Cap'n go pop hell. Be besser we go one time."

Donald Dow scowled, and absently investigated with his fingertips the tender swelling over his cheekbone. There was no fear in his face; just a kind of thunderous indignation that, he was afraid, would make him lose patience with such queer, ill-mannered folk.

"Wake up your captain," he told the boatswain again. "I'll have a word wi' him."

The boatswain made no move to obey. For a hesitant second or two it seemed as if he might decide to take a chance on tackling Donald himself—a gesture that both Carfax and Bolton would expect him to make—but before he could make up his mind on the subject, there came suddenly from somewhere forward of the saloon skylight the thunder of a voice.

"Carfax!"

The bull-like bellow might have been heard clear across the river, and its effect upon Carfax, Bolton and the dull, hesitant boatswain was nothing if not galvanic.

The first and second mates, still somewhat entangled, parted company and scrambled to their feet. They were both still very short of breath. Bolton swayed on his long gangling legs as if he were heading into a gale, and Carfax rolled upright, his little eyes wide, his heavy hands pawing for the rail in an instinctive effort to find something to hang on to.

"Carfax! Bolton!"

Donald had turned his head in the direction of the voice, then glanced at the boatswain.

"Is that the captain?"

"Yah," the boatswain said in a thick whisper and muttered a string of German oaths strictly for his own private edification.

"Thank ye. Don't you bother. I'll find him mysel'."

"*Nein!*" the boatswain expostulated. "He iss—*ach*—"

What the captain was, Donald did not wait to hear. He turned his back on the boatswain and on the first and second officers and, with a grunt to his Krooboy, he strode forward around a ventilator in search of the voice.

He had no trouble finding it, because the voice continued to proclaim its whereabouts in violent, stentorian explosions right up until the moment when Donald, guided by a light that shone through an open door just aft of the bridge, came to a halt in the doorway of a cabin and solemnly considered the truly volcanic excitement of one of the most turbulent men he had ever seen.

This man was Captain Rackwell of the *Bola*, familiarly known as the Nigger Killer.

He looked the part. He was not much, if any, taller than Donald, but he had the girth and the weight and the dark and heavy jowl of the professional bully—a thunder-black personality who rumbled and crackled and roared and hurled the lightning bolts of his wrath indiscriminately around him; a man who ruled his ship exclusively by fear and who knew and understood no force other than the law of the sea and the crushing, breaking power that was in his naked hands.

Most of the time, however, Rackwell found it more convenient, and less wearing on the hands, to use a belt with a heavy brass buckle. He had worn out several belts in the course of his career.

Just then, swaying and lurching beside a desk, his huge body bathed in perspiration and still obviously ridden by sleep and alcohol, Rackwell was as fully dressed as he ever was in the tropics; that is, he wore a sleeveless singlet and none too clean drill trousers that were tucked into a pair of mosquito boots.

His thick breathing was punctuated by sharp, staccato oaths. He fumbled in his pockets in search of something or other he had evidently lost. A key chain, which was minus keys, dangled

from his belt, and when he reached down for this chain and looked darkly down upon the empty clip, it was evidently very difficult for him to realize that his keys had, somehow, gone astray.

"Have ye lost something?" Donald asked mildly, stepping from out of the blur of shadows beyond Rackwell's cabin doorway and into full view.

"MY KEYS," Rackwell snorted mechanically, and then his head came up sharply as if the sound of a voice that was strange to him had suddenly groped its way through the riotous jumble inside his head. "Eh? What the—who in hell are you? Carfax! Bolton! Ain't there no discipline at all on this lousy ship?"

The scuff of hurrying feet coming along the deck on Donald's right made him turn his head a moment, then step to one side within the cabin doorway, while his faithful Krooboy henchman waited in shaking indecision on the outside.

"I came to talk to ye about a dead man," Donald said. "A Krooboy, your leadthrower. I found him dead on my beach."

"He's a liar!" Carfax exploded, rolling suddenly through the doorway with one huge arm flung across his middle in defense of the spot where Donald's boot had landed. "He kicked me in the belly! And—and he nearly strangled Bolton because we told him the dead nigger he brought on board ain't our leadthrower like he says he is."

"Lead—wh—what's that? Manhandling my officers!"

Rackwell's bluster was dark and real and menacing enough, but he was really sparring for time, while he tried, momentarily at least, to sidetrack the loss of his keys so as to find room inside his stormy head for all of the startling facts so suddenly laid before him.

"Who is this interferin' swine? Where's he from?"

"Says his name's Dow," Carfax said. "One of Balloch's men. Balloch's gone up to Sapeli."

"Hunh, Balloch has, eh?"

Rackwell seemed to be considering this, but his expression just then was difficult to analyze. There was unbelief in it, just a hint of caution and of indecision, and the suggestion that he was thinking very rapidly while he was considering Donald with leisurely and brutish amusement.

"Booted my first mate in the belly, eh?" he said at last very slowly. "Squeezed Bolton's thrapple a bit. Brought a ruddy dead nigger aboard my ship!" Rackwell's heavy face became black with anger. "And pinched my keys!"

Donald's chin came up sharply in no little confusion, and even Carfax, now joined by the lanky and colorless second officer, looked as if he felt that the skipper was going just a step too far. But Rackwell, with the threat of the dead leadthrower suddenly confronting him, knew what he was doing and found it very convenient to let the counter-accusation stand.

"Where are my keys?" he thundered. "Hand 'em over or I'll break you up!"

Donald almost gaped.

"Ye—why, man—ye know fine I haven't got your keys."

"You lyin' swine!" Rackwell's bull voice made Donald's protest sound like a whisper. "That dead nigger you brought aboard don't belong on this ship. And you know damned well he don't. And when you were picking a fight with my officers about him, one of your lousy niggers pinched my keys. Hand 'em over!"

Donald Dow's very exact thinking processes came to a sudden and staggering halt. There were no words for a situation like that, no words that mattered.

"Ye—ye're daft! Mad!" he exploded with a very depressing sense of futility upon him. "Ye know fine your keys were lost afore I—"

"You're a liar!" Rackwell's heavy right fist supplied the exclamation point and Donald, big as he was, spun through the cabin doorway and spread-eagled on the deck beyond, blinking up at the black roof of the night.

He did not blink very long. For he barely had time to realize what had happened to him when the crumpling figure of his Krooboy bodyguard sprawled beside him, and Rackwell's

all too eager boots were thudding painfully and dangerously into the black boy's ribs.

Vaguely Donald knew that this was not right. And then his head suddenly cleared and he knew, for the second time that evening, that it was all wrong —the cruel and criminal persecution of a dumbly loyal black . . .

Maybe it was the word persecution, a word that had been familiar to his Covenanting forebears, that brought Donald so sharply to his feet. Or maybe it was just that Rackwell's boots turned their attention to him.

But whatever it was, the man who suddenly stood face to face with the Nigger Killer was not the man the African Merchants beach had known. This man had fire in his eyes, leaping flames that almost crackled and gave red warning that Donald Dow had at last lost his temper.

Yet he had come up without a sound; and without a sound, with hardly so much as the whisper of a deeply drawn breath, all that was Donald Dow—bone, nerve and sinew—hurtled at Rackwell, head down.

THE Nigger Killer's right, hurried and flustered, missed an uppercut that whistled viciously past Donald's ear, and a split second later Rackwell was reeling backward pawing space and feeling that he had been hit in his midsection with a battering ram.

They struck the deck together, a clawing, kicking tangle of arms and legs, their bodies writhing and heaving and rolling, over and over, Rackwell's fists thudding into Donald's face and ribs, his knees trying to find the right sort of opportunity to bury themselves in Donald's stomach.

Twice Rackwell was on top; and twice it seemed to Carfax and Bolton and to the frightened Krooboy, who had scrambled whimperingly out of the way, that it was all over except for the final brutal battering of the Nigger Killer's heavy fists into Donald's upturned face. But twice Donald heaved and wriggled free, and the second time this happened Rackwell found himself sprawled face down with Donald's long, hard body piled on top of him.

Carfax and Bolton gaped, and Rackwell did some gaping on his own account. For in the succeeding few sharp and decisive seconds he knew without a doubt that in Donald Dow he had met a kind of irresistible force that was definitely going somewhere and with startling directness and efficiency.

An arm of iron had suddenly circled about his throat—an immovable bar that shut off his wind so that his breath came in burning, labored gasps. His legs, which had thrashed out wildly, had been gathered into the grip of longer, leaner, harder legs that bound them sharply and painfully in a twisting, bone cracking tangle; and his powerful right arm, with wire-like fingers fastened about the wrist, was bent dangerously upward behind him. Only his left arm was free, and even its freedom was restrained by the fact that most of his own and Donald's weight bore down upon it.

Just how all this had happened to him so abruptly and so efficiently the Nigger Killer was not sure. But that it had happened and that he was in serious danger of having an arm or his neck broken was being more agonizingly impressed upon him every second.

Rackwell's huge body strained and heaved in surprised and strangling desperation, and presently great drops of cold perspiration stood out on his forehead. His red rimmed, bloodshot eyes were popping wide with a staring look of fear, a fear that was born not only of the reality of his own danger, but also of the threat of being beaten on his own deck and before the eyes of his own kind whom he had bullied so brutally and for so long.

Perhaps this was why neither Carfax nor Bolton interfered. Perhaps it was because Rackwell never liked interference, having so often boasted of his super-ability to do all of his own fighting. Or perhaps it was just that the thing happened so suddenly and surprisingly that even Rackwell himself did not altogether understand until the strenuous squirming and straining he indulged in seemed only to tighten Donald's strangling hold about his neck.

The Nigger Killer paused. He had

to. The black world about him had taken on a blood-red hue, and if he had had the breath to cry out he would have used it to curse Carfax and Bolton for not coming to his assistance. And if he ever succeeded in wresting his neck from the stranglehold Donald had taken upon it . . . Even then, Rackwell was not so far gone as to be beyond the satisfying thought of vengeance.

He was sure his right arm had gone; sure he had heard it crack; and the wholly involuntary cry that tore its way out of his burning throat seemed to him to climb above the duller thunders that roared in his ears. However, no one heard it. Not even Donald Dow. And Rackwell only imagined the cry he heard was his, because that other piercing scream of agony or fear or both that lifted itself into the pitch-black roof of the night, was so perfectly the echo of his own—a blood-chilling scream that came from somewhere aft and trailed haltingly, gurgling forward and down.

Donald paid no attention to it. He had another, nearer and more pressing matter upon his mind. Besides, the *Bola* was a queer ship anyway and queer things were likely to happen on it. But if he had cast a look in the direction of Carfax and Bolton and at his own faithful Krooboy, he would have known that this was different.

The first and second officers and the Krooboy were now staring aft in the direction from which that unearthly scream had come. And from stem to stern a dead quiet gripped the *Bola* for a few breathless seconds—a volcanic silence that stifled action and which might result in anything.

Then there came another scream and yet another and another; shrill warning cries; voices that called back and forth in several tongues; figures that hurtled suddenly into view and just as suddenly hurtled out again; cabin doors slamming; bedlam and pandemonium tearing up and down the *Bola's* decks. And out of all this shrieking confusion came the one stark intelligible thing.

"The puma! The puma is out!"

Donald heard all this vaguely as through a fog. Vaguely, too, as he methodically and with truly terrible precision, squeezed most of the fight out of the Nigger Killer's great body, he realized that the blob-like shape of Carfax and the attenuated shadow of Bolton no longer hung about him. Only the stooping figure of the Krooboy remained, bending over to tap him on the shoulder and tug at his shirt with fingers that shook almost as much as his voice.

"Mas' Dow! Puma come. All man go 'way. Puma go kill we, sah, one time!"

Donald heard the boy plainly enough; heard and understood that the viciously snarling puma had somehow escaped from its cage and was roaming the *Bola's* decks, a very savage and ugly menace to every one on board. It might come his way any minute.

The leaping flames in his eyes had died down a bit. But a steadier, smoldering fire remained; and though he released his tangling hold upon Rackwell's legs, he hung on to the Nigger Killer's right arm and neck. Then, still quite effectively keeping the nearly strangled skipper at a disadvantage, cautiously brought him to his feet, hustled him through the open cabin door and finally flung him on his own bed.

"If ye put any value on your life, ye'll lie there," Donald growled, and looked around hurriedly for something that would serve as a weapon. "And ye needn't bother wastin' time sweerin'. Just get your breath and tell me where ye keep your guns if ye have any."

There was an Upper Niger wrist knife acting as a paper weight on Rackwell's desk, and when Donald spied this he picked it up, yanked the blade from its sheath and handed it to the shivering Krooboy, whose glance was ever turned fearfully toward the blackness of the deck beyond the cabin doorway.

"Here," Donald said, "take this. It'll be better than nothing."

And as the Krooboy's eager hand closed convulsively on the hilt of the weapon, Donald's roving eyes caught sight of a Winchester repeater that, with two golfing irons, an ornate, single bladed paddle and a knob headed stick, occupied an obscure corner behind a trunk.

HE POSSESSED himself of the Winchester, found to his surprise that it was loaded, then moved abruptly toward the doorway, grunting briefly to the Nigger Killer in passing:

"I'll borrow this for a wee while. Ye'll hear from me again later."

Then he was out on deck again, the Krooboy at his heels, closing Rackwell's cabin door behind him. For a few breathless seconds Donald stood very still, looking cautiously but steadily aft, trying to get his eyes accustomed to the shadows.

"The beast," he said more to himself than to the Krooboy, "is probably more feared o' us than we are o' him. But it'll no do to depend too much on that."

"Yessah," the Krooboy agreed in a breathless whisper, though he had not understood a word of it.

"Keep right at my heels," Donald said, beginning to move. "We go now."

Inching along the deck, peering all about them, studying every shadow very intently and trying to interpret the scattered calls that sounded here and there on the deck below, they moved slowly aft toward the companion leading down to the after deck and the rope ladder.

They passed the saloon companion, ventilators, deckhouses; all of them shadow bound and suggestive of all sorts of stealthy, cat-like possibilities. And once, when Donald looked behind him, he saw that Rackwell, his cabin door slightly open, was either observing their departure or was looking warily for the puma.

There was a revolver in Rackwell's left hand, and though Donald could not see it, he had an uncomfortable feeling in the middle of his back when he faced aft again. He had had enough experience with Rackwell to realize that he was not exactly dependable. It was just possible that he might be angry and desperate enough to take a shot at him in mistake for the puma!

Of course, Rackwell would be very sorry for his mistake, but with a puma loose on his decks, mistakes of the sort were not altogether preventable; not in the dark of night when every moving shadow was a threat.

Donald did not really believe Rackwell would take a chance like that. And yet a trickling chill struck Donald's spine.

He felt the sudden vice-like grip of the Krooboy's fingers on his arm.

"Lookum!" the boy breathed. "Dere!"

Donald looked behind him in time to see a low, lithe, cat-like shadow that paused a second or two about midway between the saloon skylight and the rail; then it darted sharply for the deeper shadow of a ventilator and disappeared.

"Came up the saloon companion most like," Donald whispered, lowering the Winchester. "He'll be back. He's feared for his life, poor beast, and I think he limped."

"Yessah," the Krooboy said automatically and sidled into greater security behind Donald. "Maybe-so you shoot next time."

"Maybe-so," Donald said, but doubted that he would.

Rackwell was still filling the half open cabin doorway, and Donald, for the moment, was thinking more of this than of the puma; particularly since the beast was definitely known to be on the upper deck. If Rackwell wanted to make a mistake now . . . Donald's grip on the Winchester tightened. The butt snuggled into his shoulder.

"If I were in my right senses," he grumbled, "I'd just go down to the boat and go back to the beach. But—"

"Lookum, sah!"

Donald saw it; the same cat-like shadow that limped just a little; a bewildered, frightened shadow that streaked across the deck toward the rail, then, just as before, hesitated a moment and turned to dart back again.

Two guns spoke; the first unexpectedly from the bridge, and the other, not quite so unexpectedly, from the doorway of Rackwell's cabin. The puma stopped in its tracks and lurched forward on one shoulder.

And at the same instant came the vicious whine of a bullet singing perilously close to Donald's head.

"The murderin' hound!" Donald breathed, and the spiteful, crackling voice of the Winchester flung Rackwell an answer that buried itself with a nasty, biting chug in the jamb of the

cabin door.

Rackwell heard that answer. Inasmuch as it clipped his ear in passing, he heard it so plainly that his own gun slipped from his nervous fingers and thudded to the deck.

"The murderin' hound!" Donald muttered again in cold indignation, just as two more shots rang out from the marksman on the bridge.

But they were wild shots apparently, because the puma, picking itself up, whirled blindly in a staggering half circle, then headed in drunken, wounded fury straight toward Rackwell, who was frantically trying to pick up his gun.

PERHAPS the puma really did know what it was doing as its life blood drained on the *Bola's* decks. And perhaps the hate in its savage soul, with all the vicious intensity of which it was capable, lifted it in that one last desperate leap straight toward the *Bola's* skipper.

Another hurried report from the bridge, and yet another colder, surer shot from Donald's borrowed Winchester appeared to take the great cat in midair and turn it slightly sidewise. But it completed the leap for all that and struck Rackwell about the head and shoulders as he tried to straighten.

Rackwell screamed—a terrible, deep throated sound that died for a second or two, then lifted again and again as Donald strode deliberately forward and Carfax bounded down from the bridge.

The puma had dropped draggingly to the deck before any one reached Rackwell. It was dead.

But Rackwell still screamed, covering one side of his face with his good left hand. Blood streamed through his fingers, and as he staggered back into his cabin he still held his hand over his face, threshing about like a madman and filling the black African night with the guttural thunders of his agony.

And there, so far as Donald Dow was concerned, his queer adventure on a queerer ship came to an abrupt and unexpected end.

No one saw him punctiliously return the Winchester and the Upper Niger wrist knife to their accustomed places. No one saw him and his Krooboy leave the ship. Or, at least, no one considered it advisable to question either his comings or goings—the Nigger Killer least of all.

And, of course, in the hubbub of excitement that whirled about Rackwell's cabin, there was no sign of Gronda, the Krooboy with one eye, the brother of the dead leadthrower.

Gronda did not belong on the upper deck; and if the forecastle had been searched just then, it would have been discovered that Gronda had concluded that he did not belong there either.

For Gronda, taking his dead brother along with him, and leaving Rackwell's keys hanging from the padlock on the puma's cage, had gone. He had gone with the scream of the boatswain sounding pleasantly in his ears when the puma had first stalked to freedom. Consequently, Gronda did not hear or see what happened to Rackwell.

Doubtless, however, through the whispering, subterranean channels of trading beach Kroohouses, he heard about it later. And doubtless, too, he got great satisfaction out of knowing that Rackwell and he were even in more than one respect.

But the story of how Rackwell, the Nigger Killer, lost an eye was a closed book to white men. For Donald Dow never spoke of it. As far as he was concerned the matter had passed beyond the domain of mere words; and when he returned to the African Merchants Company's beach that night, he rummaged solemnly in his biggest cabin trunk, found a service revolver for which he had not expected to have any use and transferred it to a handy drawer in his desk.

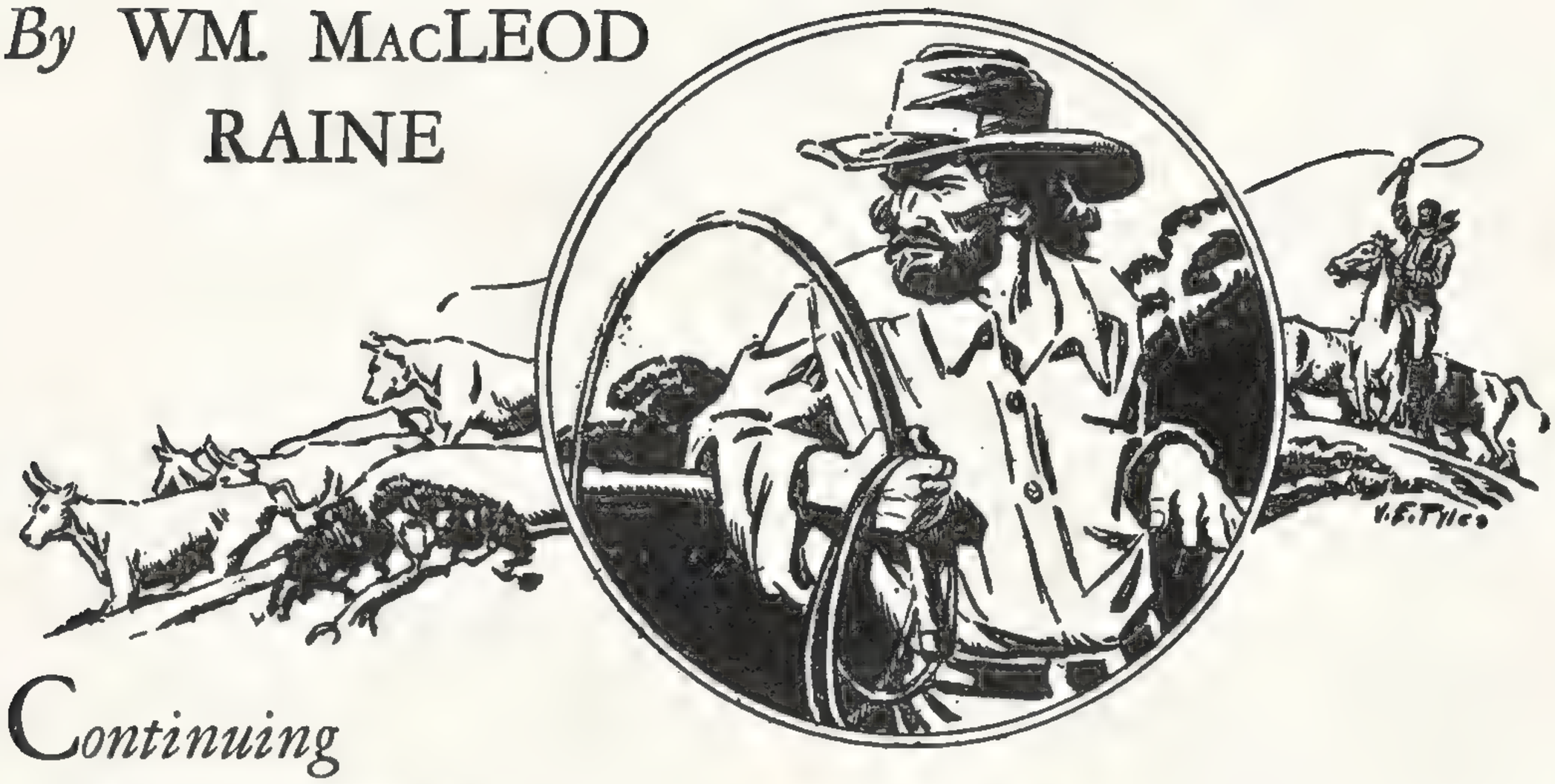
"That'll be the best way," he decided unemotionally, "in case—"

But that, as it happened, was that.

Because Rackwell, as time divulged, lost more than an eye that night. He lost his grip; lost it and never found it again. Something went out of him and stayed out. He did not reform; nothing so banal as that. But white men who knew him best looked into his remaining eye and knew that something inside the man had died.

The "Nigger Killer" perhaps.

By WM. MacLEOD RAINE



Continuing

The BROAD ARROW

The Story Thus Far:

FALSELY accused of murder by his cousin, Henry Killough, Geoffrey Blake accepted a life sentence to the prison camps of Australia because he would not compromise Victoria Day, who had been in his rooms at the time of the crime. Victoria kept silent at her lover's trial, the sentence was read—and Henry Killough complimented himself that old Sir Eustace Blake could not fail now to make him his heir, nor Victoria refuse to marry him, knowing as he did that she had been in Geoffrey's room the night of the murder.

Months later Victoria came aboard the prison ship *Success,* of which Killough was master, with her friend, Mary McQueen. By chance the visitors saw Blake—who had taken the name of John Haxon—being dragged from the whipping frame. Crying his name in horror, Victoria fainted. To prevent another such dangerous meeting, Killough had Blake transferred to the prison camp of the brutal Major McQuirk, miles in the bush beyond Sydney.

Biding his time, Blake finally made a successful break for freedom. With him were two carefully chosen companions, Burke and Robbins. Following the outlaw trail, the three soon became famous as the Haxon bushrangers.

One day Blake led his men into the town of Parametta and stuck up the bank. Mary McQueen, in the place by chance, was accidentally shot. Without reproach she told Blake, who stopped to assist her, to escape. She believed him innocent of the crime for which he had been convicted and brutalized.

Making through the bush to his hideout, Blake came across a man who had been cruelly treated by the outlaw, Jack Lynch. Blake was amazed to recognize the fellow as one Jones, who had testified against him at Killough's behest during the murder trial in England. The outlaw forced Jones to go before Jim Stuart, a friendly magistrate, and tell the true story of the crime: Jones had accidentally witnessed the murder of Mullin by Killough; and Killough had threatened to have Jones deported on some trumped-up charge unless he supported him in fastening the guilt on Blake. Mullin had been blackmailing Killough because he knew he had been stealing from his uncle, Sir Eustace.

Meanwhile Jack Lynch, who hated Blake because of his popularity with the wasteland settlers, had started a campaign to blacken his name. After a series of brutal crimes, at each of which he had boasted he was the "great Haxon", all Australia was demanding Blake's apprehension. Only Mary McQueen remained loyal to the bushranger. To Jim Stuart she said one day:

"This brutality and braggadocio doesn't fit the character of Blake. It's Lynch—he's been doing this very kind of thing for two years."

"Yes," Stuart admitted. "By George—it might be Lynch!"

"IT IS," Mary McQueen said positively. "It can't be anybody else. Nobody ever heard Haxon—if you want to use the name Geoffrey Blake has taken—curse vilely and savagely, the way the leader of these bushrangers did on these raids. Sometimes he is bitter and harsh and sardonic, but he expresses himself with restraint. Don't you see, Jim, that at every single point this ruffian

is at the opposite pole from the man we've met? He couldn't possibly be the same one."

"Of course you're right, Mary," Stuart admitted with a deep breath of relief. "It's simple enough when you use your brains. But what can Lynch be up to? It can't save his neck if he's caught to foist off these last outrages on Haxon. There's too much against him."

"I don't know his reason. Maybe he's jealous of Haxon's reputation and wants to smirch it."

"That's what father thought," Will McQueen said.

"Does your father think Haxon is innocent of these murders?"

"He does now," the boy said. "Mary converted him. I was with her all the time."

"As soon as she had done your thinking for you," Ted gibed. "You were just like I was. You took it for granted Haxon was doing it, and it didn't sit well on you. When Mary gave you a chance to change your mind you jumped at it. So did I. All I've got to say is I hope we're right."

"We are," Mary said confidently. "Grant for argument's sake that Geoffrey Blake is fiend enough to do such cruel things. If you concede him any brains—and he has always shown finesse and cleverness in all his stickups—he wouldn't be such a fool. He's driven all his friends away from him now—or rather Lynch has done it for him. Both of them are almost bound to be run down soon."

"Soon now." Stuart nodded. "The worst of it is that nothing Haxon can say will clear him with the public. He's the dog with the bad name now, and they'll hang him."

"They'll hang Lynch too, if that's any comfort to him," Ted added.

"Let's not talk about such things," Mary cried. "I'd like to do something for him. I'd like to let him know we don't all believe horrible things about him."

Ted McQueen thought that Jim Stuart looked at his sister with a question in his eyes. More than once he had entertained the same doubt.

"We mustn't forget, Mary, that after all he's only a convict," the boy admonished primly.

"No, we mustn't ever forget that," Mary retorted fiercely.

"There's no need of getting so excited about the fellow."

"I'm not excited," she denied. "I don't suppose you ever heard of such a thing as justice."

"Tosh!" he said derisively.

It occurred to Stuart, with a meditative eye on the flaming girl, that justice might become a much more potent motive when it had for its subject a good looking, romantic scamp like Geoffrey Blake.

CHAPTER XXII

ROBBINS BRINGS NEWS

BURKE lay with his head on a saddle reading a copy of the Parametta weekly newspaper which he had obtained from a cattle duffer at the Ross shanty.

"Bejabers!" he exclaimed, and fell with a sudden interest to devouring an article on an inside page.

Paper in hand, he went to Blake.

"Here's something might interest you, Chief. There's one squatter anyhow with a half a pint of brains in his head."

The article was a letter from Edward McQueen. He was, Geoffrey knew, the father of Mary, and one of the influential men of the district. It had been headed by the editor, "A Weighty Opinion."

> As an honest settler, I am against all bushrangers. Most of them are vile refuse of the evil penal system which England has fastened upon this colony. Yet even a busher has rights, and it is well that we do not jump hastily to false conclusions.
>
> For the following reasons I am convinced that the Haxon gang is not responsible for the recent orgy of bloodshed in the scrub.
>
> (1) The leader of the gang was not riding the famous stallion without which he is never seen.
>
> (2) It is not reasonable to suppose he would wear a mask to conceal his identity and then announce his name.
>
> (3) Haxon is said to be a teetotaler, and on the occasion of the Stilton raid the leader was drunk.
>
> (4) None of the new stickups had any of the earmarks of a Haxon job. They were too brutal and quite lacked the cleverness he has always shown. On the other hand, they very much resemble the work of another notorious bushranger, one whose name

I need not mention.

If the squatters will cooperate heartily with the constabulary these pests of the bush will be completely wiped out in a very short time. The best black trackers should be employed and the outlaws hunted continuously.

Yours for a bush free from robbers and murderers.

—EDWARD MCQUEEN

"He does not care for us much, Pat," Blake commented dryly.

"Not much, but anyhow he wants to give the divvel his due. He likes Lynch even less than he does us."

"Which isn't saying much. I'm beginning to think, Pat, that it might be well for us to ride west. Some of the honest men of Blind Man's Gap will sell us one of these fine days."

"I'd like to wait until Lynch and his beauties come back and shoot a few holes in them before we go, Cap."

"Business before pleasure. You wouldn't like to meet them any more than I would, but it's a joy we'll have to deny ourselves. We'll leave today, Pat."

They did, but not for the west. Robbins had been hunting and he returned to camp with a bit of news that changed the destiny of every one of them. He had met Bill Redruth, an escaped convict, one of the men Lynch had picked up as a replacement for the two he had lost.

"He was tight as a sailor on leave. You know we were on the chain once together. Well, Bill spilled it. They've just reached the Gap, and they're staying only a few hours. I daresay, boss, they guess your back is up. Anyhow, they're 'itting the pad today to stick up the McQueen station. Going to wish the squatter and his family a merry Christmas."

Geoffrey Blake took from his mouth the pipe he was smoking.

"So it's to be the McQueen station this time," he said.

"We can pick Lynch and Hawkes off from the rocks above while they're going out of the Gap," Burke cried excitedly. "The other lads we can let go. They'll run like scared rabbits, so they will."

Blake made no comment on this plan. His mind was engaged with another phase of the matter.

"Where did you meet Redruth, old-timer?" he asked Robbins.

"Met him at the three black gums."

"Don't think it could have been a plant, do you? It would be a great victory for Lynch, after having fastened his murders on us, to lure us into a trap where we would be caught and later hanged for them."

Robbins thought this over and shook his head.

"No. Redruth couldn't 'ave expected to meet me there. He was so drunk he could 'ardly sit his horse. The man's a great blabber. What's on 'is mind has got to come out. It's no trap for us, boss."

"You're sure he wasn't assuming his drunkenness?"

"I'd take my oath. I know a drunk man when I see one."

"We'll never have a better chance to surprise Lynch," insisted Burke.

"You may be right, Pat," his chief agreed.

Already he had rejected Burke's plan. He had another in mind, much less simple, more daring and hazardous, but one which, if successful, had the merit of including vindication with revenge. It would also justify the satisfaction of a desire he had been sternly suppressing.

"All I ask is first crack at him," Burke said angrily. "I'll show him if he can lay his deviltry on us."

"Muster the horses, boys," Blake gave order, rising to his feet and knocking his pipe on a boot heel. "Pack the swags. We'll take tucker for three days. No packhorse. We'll travel light and fast."

"Where are we going?" Robbins asked.

"We're going to give Mr. Lynch a little surprise. Maybe we can live up to the reputation he has been earning for us. Anyhow, we'll try," Blake said.

There was the gleam of a savage, ironic humor in his eyes.

The horses were brought in, blueys rolled and swags packed. Blake sent Robbins out as a scout to watch the movements of the enemy. He was to lie hidden in the rocks above the gorge and was to bring word to the camp if Lynch and his party left the Gap.

The hours dragged. Tarcoola Jack and Burke played cards and their chief read a new novel by a young English writer named Charles Dickens. When

Robbins returned it was midafternoon.

"They've gone," he said. "All four of 'em. No packhorse with them."

Wirra and the injured man stayed in camp. The others took horse as soon as the news came. They passed down the canyon and through the gateway.

Robbins swung from the saddle and examined the tracks in the sand. For a mile he followed them on foot.

The leader of the party wanted to make sure of the direction in which the other outlaws had headed.

CHAPTER XXIII

LYNCH STRIKES

IT WAS Christmas Day. The sun in the blue sky beat down mercilessly on a parched land. But the young people on the McQueen station, gathered for the festivities from far and near, were used to the fierce dry heat of the antipodes. The girls were decked in gay Summer colors. Most of the men wore white trousers, very smart, tucked in Wellington boots.

They were all British, either by birth or descent, but the games they played had a local flavor. Just now they were all outdoors. The women kept to the shade of the long, vine covered porch. They were there to applaud and encourage the men in a contest known as "flipping it". A circle about the size of a saucer was drawn on the ground and a sixpence, head up, put inside of it. Each of the stockmen in turn tried to flip over the coin with the lash of a stock whip and yet leave it within the circle. Only the most expert touch could do the trick.

The McQueen lads had failed. So had Halliday, Stuart, and the other guests, with the exception of Killough. Since the soldier knew nothing about cracking a whip he did not try.

"You show them, father," urged Mary. "You get one shot at it to find the range and then three to flip the sixpence."

The squatter had come out to call them to dinner. He stroked his big flowing beard and smiled, but he did not mind showing these youngsters what an old hand could do.

He took the whip from his son Ted and moved back about twenty feet from the circle, measuring the distance with his eye. To test the whip and fit it to his hand, he cracked it once, making a sound like the explosion of a rifle. Again his eye checked the space between him and the coin. He swung the whip. The lash leaped out, swift as the forked tongue of a snake. The tip of it seemed just to touch the bit of silver. The sixpence jumped up and fell. It lay not an inch from where it had been before.

Ted ran forward and stooped.

"He's turned it," the boy cried excitedly.

To prove it was no chance the squatter did it again.

"Compared with Mr. McQueen, we're all new chums," Stuart admitted.

Mrs. McQueen clapped her hands smilingly.

"In for dinner with you. I daresay you're ready to eat a bite."

Halliday tucked his arm under hers and led the way.

"Can we?" he shouted. "Nobody ever welshed on a Mother McQueen dinner, let alone a Christmas one."

"Hip-hip!" cried Stuart, and followed with Nora McQuirk.

Ted seized Victoria Day. The others trooped after them noisily.

Before they sat down they drank a toast to the queen. The squatter did not approve of the heavy, steady drinking which prevailed in the colony, but he made an exception of Christmas Day. The young women merely touched the port with their lips, but the men drained their glasses. They noted with satisfaction that these were at once refilled.

A temporary table had been built to accommodate all the guests. It was laden with good cheer. There was a young suckling pig at one end, roasted whole; at the other a huge sirloin of beef. Near the center was a parrot pie, flanked by vegetables. There were pigeon pies and fowls. On a side table were melons and ripe red strawberries. Through the kitchen door came the savory odors of mince pies and the plum pudding.

The chatter and laughter were incessant. Some of the girls had been caught beneath the mistletoe; others were threatened. This was the beginning of

a long week of gaiety, to be concluded in Sydney with the wedding of Captain Killough and Victoria Day.

About that wedding two men present felt very guilty. They did not intend to let it take place, and both of them felt they should have spoken earlier to Major Day. But they were under a pledge to keep silent until certain news arrived from England. Every day they had been expecting it. They had agreed if it did not come in time to speak anyhow. But to do this would be to warn Killough, for without doubt Major Day would go straight to his prospective son-in-law for a denial. Stuart and Halliday hoped a ship would bring mail before the first of the year, with information decisive enough to prove Blake either right or wrong. Even now, while the issue was still in doubt, they found it difficult to meet Killough with even a pretense of cordiality. The captain noticed this, but he laid it to jealousy. They were probably in love with Victoria, he decided, and hated him for being the successful wooer.

A voice, harsh with cruel mockery, broke into the gay mirth.

"Merry Christmas, all!"

A huge figure filled the doorway, stood directly under the mistletoe where Victoria had been caught and kissed by Tom Halliday not ten minutes earlier. The man was masked. He carried a brace of revolvers, one in each hand. He was dressed in spurred boots, fancy riding breeches, fine linen shirt, and wideawake hat. Yet in spite of his good clothes there was something awkward and loutish about him. That he was a bushranger McQueen knew instantly, even before his hoarse "Bail up!" came growling out.

KILLOUGH half rose to his feet, startled at this apparition, but at his host's sharp command to sit down sank back to his chair. McQueen knew that if shooting began anybody might be killed, even some of the women present. Already another of the band, masked and armed, was standing at the door leading into the kitchen, a third was in the doorway opening into the parlor.

"Haxon," murmured Nora McQuirk.

Mary knew better. So did her father, her brothers, and Jim Stuart. This fellow was too bulky and brutish, too coarse.

The leader of the outlaws showed bad teeth in an evil grin.

"Right, young lady. Mr. John Haxon, come here just to eat his Christmas dinner with you."

Another of the masked men spoke up savagely.

"You can lay to it that ain't all we're here for. We've got some scores to pay. The longest one is with that mankilling flogger, Killough. We didn't expect to find *him* here. We're in luck. How'd you like five hundred hard, Killough?"

The stomach muscles of the soldier collapsed. In his beefy face the purple faded to a yellow blotched with red.

"I—don't know who you are," he gasped.

"An old friend, Captain," the bushranger jeered. "Maybe you've forgot, but I haven't, how you tickled my back for me on that hellship, the *Success*. A Botany Bay dozen twice. Fifty hard another time. I'm going to string you up and see how you like it yourself."

Killough swallowed a lump in his dry throat.

"I only did my duty," he pleaded hoarsely.

"Like I'll do mine, to the tune of five hundred," the outlaw exulted.

A sobbing moan broke from the lips of Victoria. She was afraid.

The big man in the riding outfit grinned at her.

"Don't be feared, miss. I'll look after you—me, John Haxon, personally. Since you need some one to protect you I'll be the cove that does it. How'd you like to go into the bush with a gentleman of fortune, my dear?"

"If you've come to rob us, get to work," McQueen said.

Angrily the leader turned on him.

"You're the blighter who's against all bushrangers, who wants to get black trackers and hunt us down like dingoes. Guess what I'm going to do to you before I leave."

"Don't be a fool," the squatter cried sharply. "We all know you're the ruffian, Lynch. You can't hurt me without adding one more to the score you'll have

to pay for on Gallows Hill. The more you kill the less chance you or any of your gang will have of mercy."

"That's true," Stuart said. "Rob us if you like, then go bush soon as you can. The whole country is out looking for you."

"Were you looking for us when we dropped in for Christmas dinner?" the big outlaw jeered. "I'm running this jamboree. Don't you forget it. You'll shut your mouths and take orders, blast you. I'll do what I want to, I'll go when I please, and I'll take with me what I fancy. Put that in your pipes and smoke it."

His gloating eyes shifted for a moment to Victoria. The young woman grew sick with terror. She knew what he meant.

"No," she cried faintly.

"Jolly times we'll have together, you and I, dearie. I'll go bail you've never had a real gentleman of the bush for a lover. It'll be a treat for you. I'm none of your white livered lallygaggers. When you're my woman you'll know you've got a man and a master."

He finished with an oath, vile and savage.

"Get on with what you've come to do," McQueen said, looking boldly at the man. "And remember that women are not in this—unless you want to be hunted down and torn to pieces by kangaroo dogs."

Lynch showed his teeth in a cruel grin.

"Right you are, Mr. Honest Settler. I'll get on, since you're asking for it."

The revolver in his right hand exploded with a roar. McQueen stared at him, a little stupidly, as though he did not understand what had taken place. Then, without a sound, he slumped in his chair.

Panic filled the room. Mary jumped up and ran to her father. Others started from their chairs. A woman's voice lifted in a cry of terror.

"Sit down!" the bushranger roared. "Back in your seats!"

Stuart disregarded the order. He ran around the table, intent on getting between Mary and the man who had fired. Twice more the revolver sounded. The Scotch squatter stumbled and went down, coughing and groaning.

Most of the guests, stampeded by fear, pressed back against the wall. Nobody could escape from the room except past an armed bandit.

"Bail up! Bail up, you fools!" Lynch shouted. "Unless you want a bloody massacre."

Halliday seconded him.

"Get your hands up, all of you," he urged. "Quick. He's ready to turn tiger."

The bushranger chief was pouring out a flood of curses.

Up went the trembling hands, all but those of Mary and her mother and Ted. They were busy with the old squatter who had been shot.

"If there's anybody else wants me to get on, let's hear from the blasted blighter," Lynch yelled, savage triumph in his voice.

"No more shooting, boss," one of his men cried. "Better get to business now."

Hawkes added his word.

"Business first, then pleasure. I expect to enjoy giving this man-tamer his five hundred hard."

From Killough's throat there came a despairing moan.

CHAPTER XXIV

THROUGH THE BUSH

THE Haxon party went bush*. They rode through a land naked, rich and inhospitable. A protracted drought had left the scrub inflammably dry. It was a hilly district. From the heights they could look down on long brown ground swells like the backs of sleeping lions huddled close.

Yet in that rolling contour were concealed river channels, wattle and ti-tree swamps, low mallee scrub, and stony ridges sown with ironbarks. It held the long, enduring silences of the Austral wild, so depressing to those who have not within themselves sources of entertainment.

The riders moved into a dust storm. It beat upon them, a yellow swirl of powder that filled their lungs and sifted into every wrinkle and crevice of their

* To go bush is to leave the road and strike across country.

clothes. They could not see ten feet in front of them. It was as though the world were narrowed to a space the walls of which they could almost touch.

Robbins called a halt.

"Have to take to a gully. If we don't we'll get lost."

He had to shout to make his voice heard.

"You mean hole up until the storm is past?" Blake said. "Think so too. Lead the way."

They went in single file, each man holding to the tail of the horse ahead. The horses stumbled on for an interminable time. After what seemed hours of going Blake knew they were heading downhill. The dust was so thick in the air that he could see only vaguely the back of Tarcoola Jack, who was riding not five feet from him.

Robbins swung to the left. They were passing through stunted ti-trees.

The old backblocker swung from the saddle.

"This will have to do," he said. "We're in a gully and have some protection."

All four of the bushrangers had tied handkerchiefs over their faces to protect themselves against breathing more dust than was necessary. They sat on the ground in a circle, heads down, each man holding to the bridle rein of his horse.

For more than twelve hours they had to stick to the shelter of the gully. It was a terrific ordeal. Their lungs ached. For long stretches they lay with their faces covered by the saddle blankets. Not until gray dawn began to show in the eastern sky did the storm die down.

They opened their tucker bag and made a breakfast, cooked very hurriedly, of damper, tea and tinned dog*. The dust storm had given Lynch a start of a full day's travel. Blake was afraid he might arrive too late to surprise the gang of his enemy. At the earliest opportunity he and his men were in the saddle.

Long and hard they rode, crossing dry rivers, dipping into gullies and out again, sweeping around and over hills. They plodded through areas of wattles in the valleys of the streams, and by nightfall had reached a region of gum forests. All day it had been hot. Flies and mosquitos had swarmed around them, and when they unsaddled to rest their mounts for a few hours insects sang in their ears as they tried to snatch some much needed sleep.

All of them were very tired, for the dust storm had taken a great deal out of them. But even three hours of sleep had done wonders for the travelers. They were all outdoor men, with the hard toughness that riding much in the sun and the wind gives to those of this stamp.

By the light of the stars Robbins guided them through the forest. He was a first class bushman and led his companions through mazes in which they would have been helpless without him.

They stopped for an hour before daybreak to rest and eat. The horses grazed while their masters ate salt beef, a bit of browny, and some cold beans, all washed down with copious drafts of tea.

Outwardly impassive, Blake was in a fever of anxiety. He reproached himself bitterly for not having let well enough alone by taking Burke's advice to make an end to this villain Lynch when he had had an opportunity. It might already be too late to save the women at the McQueen station from the man. He thought of Mary, with her boyish gallantry and her quiet cool scorn, in the hands of such a scoundrel, and he could scarcely keep from purting his horse to a gallop. More than once Robbins had to suggest to him they would make better time by not wearing out their mounts.

It was close to noon when they rode into the ten-mile block leading to the home paddock at the McQueen station. By the time the buildings of the station were visible Blake was far ahead of his companions. At a canter he passed through the home paddock and reached the first of the buildings.

A sound once very familiar to his ears greeted him as he rode up to the house. Some one in torture was screaming with pain. His gaze swept the foreground to the left. A man, stripped to the waist, was tied to a tree. Another man was flogging him, while a third stood by, revolver in hand, and guffawed with ribald laughter.

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* All kinds of preserved meats were known universally as tinned dog.

"He's here," Blake said, aloud to himself. "He's at his devilish work already."

The bushranger did not stop to rescue the man but rode straight for the house. His first obligation was to the women—to one woman in particular. In front of the piazza he flung himself from the saddle and walked across the porch into the house. He heard a woman's sob, and on the heel of it the jeering taunt of a man's harsh voice.

Blake flung open a door, and as he did so a woman darted past him into the hall. The woman was Victoria Day. Her face was colorless. Stark fear looked out of her big green eyes. The outlaw knew she did not recognize him as she flew out of the house. He had no time to stop her, even if he had been so minded. All his attention concentrated on the scene before him.

A bull voice roared—

"Stop her!"

In one corner of the room a huddle of people were gathered, close herded by a masked man with a revolver. He it was who had yelled the order to halt Victoria. On the floor lay the body of a man. Another sat slumped in a chair, wounded but not unconscious, with three or four giving him first aid. Among these was Mary McQueen. Across the room, in the direction of the door, a man was charging in pursuit of Victoria Day. He too was masked.

All this Blake saw almost instantly, even as his arm lashed out to meet the chin of the bushranger plunging toward him. Too late the masked man tried to stop himself. The driving fist caught the bearded face on the point of the jaw and the fellow went down like a pole-axed bullock. He made one effort to rise and then sank back unconscious.

"Haxon!" screamed the big fellow, and added a vile epithet.

He fired twice, realized that he had missed, and, as the man at the door raised a revolver, turned and threw himself through a window, taking most of the sash with him.

Blake did not fire. There were two or three people between him and the escaping ruffian. He ran to the window, but before he reached it Lynch had turned the corner of the house.

"He shot father and Jim Stuart," Mary McQueen cried. "One of his men is murdering Captain Killough."

"Are they badly hurt—your father and Stuart?" he asked.

"Father is hit in the arm. I don't know about Jim."

As Blake knelt to examine Stuart he said to Halliday—

"Better tie up the fellow I knocked out."

Halliday snatched up the outlaw's pistol.

"The boys can do that. I've got to help Killough."

He ran from the room. They could hear him cross the porch and jump to the ground

CHAPTER XXV

HAWKES MAKES HIS LAST PLAY

BLAKE looked up at Mary, his hand still on the heart of Stuart.

"He's alive," the bushranger said gravely.

Mary was too busy for hysterics, her mind too occupied even to give thanks that the ruffian had been driven away.

"We'll carry Jim to Ted's room and father to his own," she said. "Some one will have to go for a doctor."

"I'll go," Ted volunteered.

"Wait till we're sure we've frightened these scalawags back to the bush," Blake said.

From outside there came to them the sound of shooting.

Hurriedly the outlaw rose.

"I'll be back," he said, and went through the door on a run.

As he had guessed, a battle was on between his own men and the Lynch gang. Redruth and his chief were backing toward the pound fence where their horses were tied. As they retreated they answered the fire of Burke, Robbins and Tarcoola Jack. The crack of the guns shattered the afternoon quiet.

Hawkes had apparently been interrupted while flogging Killough and was running toward the rest of the gang. Pistol in hand, Tom Halliday raced after him. The outlaw had a start of more than fifty yards and could not be stopped by his pursuer in time to prevent him from mounting. Swiftly Blake

moved forward to intercept the bushranger.

"You damned traitor!" Hawkes cried, and stopped in his stride about thirty feet from the man barring the way.

"Drop your gun or blaze away," ordered Blake.

For a fraction of a second Hawkes hesitated. He understood that either he or the other bushranger would be shot down. Blake had deliberately put himself between Hawkes and his only chance of escape.

Yet Hawkes shirked the issue. If there was any other way—

But there was no other. He had to fight or surrender. His body weaved slightly from side to side. His face was venomous, his mouth a thin, cruel line. Blake stood motionless, waiting for him to give up or fight. All the life in the man's strong and supple body seemed to concentrate in the fire of the narrowed eyes that burned into Hawkes like live coals.

Hawkes made his choice.

"I've got you now," he screamed.

A bullet whistled past Blake's head; a second whiffed his shoulder. A third struck the ground in front of him. Hawkes was in a panic, firing as fast as he could pump lead.

What Blake did was done swiftly, yet deliberately. The hammer of his second gun fell twice. At the first discharge his foe made an abrupt half turn, as though the weight of the bullet had whirled him; at the second he pitched heavily to the ground, the revolver twitching from his slack fingers as he went down. His body rolled over and lay still, face up.

Blake took one long look at him and knew he was dead, then swung on his heel to take part in the general battle. He was too late. Redruth and Lynch had turned and made a run for their horses. Already they were scrambling into the saddles. Answering to the spur, the horses jumped to a gallop, dashed through the open gate of the paddock, and went pounding into the scrub.

Geoffrey Blake walked back to where Halliday stood looking down at the dead outlaw.

"You're thorough," the squatter said.

"He's been asking for it a long time."

Blake spoke with the clipped, high, careless voice of an upper class Englishman.

Halliday looked at him, and in his regard were both admiration and curiosity.

"Are we to count you on the side of the law now, Mr. Blake?" he asked.

"You may count me against any scoundrel who uses my name to cover his crimes. It's a personal matter. I don't think I mentioned the law, but if it's all the same to you I'll do my own sticking up."

"I wish to heaven you'd got here half an hour earlier. Poor Stuart wouldn't have been shot, or McQueen."

"We were held up twelve hours in a sand storm. All day and almost all last night we've been riding hell-for-leather."

He looked it. The dust of travel stained his face and hands. There were lines around the mouth, and his eyes stared out of dark pockets.

"Better come in and have a drink and some dinner. You've earned it."

As they walked to the house they could see Ted already saddling a horse to set out for a doctor.

"I don't think either of your friends are fatally wounded," the bushranger said. "Hope not. Stuart is a good sort."

"The best ever. I'll never have another friend like Jim."

"Then I hope you'll have him a good many years."

Halliday pulled up abruptly.

"I forgot about Killough. The poor devil's back is cut to pieces. The brute you killed attended to that. I've got to go back and look after him."

"Give him my compliments and ask him how he likes it," Blake said, with a flare of bitter ferocity.

Robbins came up as Halliday left.

"What are the orders, gov'ner?" he asked.

"I'm going in to the house," his chief answered. "We'll very likely eat dinner here."

"After we've stuck up the place?"

"Don't think so. We've done them a good turn, if we did come a bit late."

"Not too late to say how-d'ye-do to Mr. Hawkes and Mr. Lynch. If we'd known how to shoot the way you do, boss, it would have been different. I

don't see how the beggar got away with a whole skin anyhow, and three of us shooting at him and Redruth."

"Lynch wounded two squatters. Shot them down in the dining room," Blake explained. "For no reason at all, as far as I know."

"That blighter is always giving us men of the bush a bad name, gov'ner," Robbins said. "I 'ope they catch him and hang him before he's a week older."

Blake walked into the house and Mary came along the hall to meet him. She had come downstairs to find some linen for bandages.

"Have you—driven them away?" she asked.

"Yes. One of them was killed."

"None on our side hurt?"

He accepted without demur her assumption that he was on her side. It was quite true. He would always be that.

"Not any more. We surprised them, and their whole idea was to get away."

"Ted has gone to Liverpool for a doctor. Is there any chance he'll meet these villains?"

"Think not. They're riding in the opposite direction. How is your father?"

"He says it's nothing. He was hit in the arm. I'm more worried about Jim. You know he was shot trying to protect me and mother."

"I didn't know that. Let me look at his wound. I'm rather handy at that sort of thing."

As she led the way to the bedroom she said in a low voice, shaken with emotion—

"Thank God you came!"

He echoed in his heart her sentiment without admitting it.

"I think your word for me last time we met was 'that ruffian Haxon'," he mentioned cynically.

"Please," she begged of him.

"You make a distinction in villains then," he said. "Lynch and I are both bad men, but I'm a good bad man and he's not."

"I don't think you're a bad man at all," she told him.

"Afraid the law doesn't agree with you. It's willing to spend a thousand pounds to extinguish my badness," he gibed.

She stopped outside the door of the bedroom and lifted her gray eyes to his.

"I know you didn't kill that man, Mullin," she said. "I think I know who did."

"Too many in the secret," he said dryly. "Some one has been talking."

"I made Victoria tell me the night you called to see me at Jane Ferris' house. She was disturbed and told more than she meant to tell."

"Does she know who did it?"

"No, but sometimes she is afraid she does."

"How do *you* know?"

"It couldn't have been any one else."

"Are you on my side or on his?" he asked.

"I'm on your side," she answered without a moment's hesitation.

"Then will you keep the secret for a little while? It's very important. We've found new evidence and are waiting to get it confirmed from England."

"I'm so glad," she cried, in a warm glow of emotion, and impulsively offered him her hand.

He smiled sardonically.

"You forget I'm a bushranger, what your father calls a pest of the bush, 'vile refuse of the evil penal system'."

"Father doesn't know you."

He lifted his eyebrows.

"And you do?"

"Yes. I don't care anything about what you've done. You did it because there wasn't any other way open for you."

"By Jove, you're a thoroughbred," he cried, and he took her firm, warm little hand in his.

There was a burst of song in her. She looked at him, shyly, then released her hand and walked into the bedroom.

Geoffrey Blake followed her.

CHAPTER XXVI

PURSUIT

GEOFFREY BLAKE leaned against a porch post and smoked a leisurely pipe. He was aware that young Will McQueen was watching him with unveiled admiration. That might be because he had just killed a man. It had always been his rôle to play hero to

some youth.

Mrs. McQueen had invited him and his men to stay to dinner. She was very grateful to him. There was no doubt in her mind that Lynch would have killed her husband and perhaps some of the other men. What he had intended to do with the young women she could only guess with a shudder. A plump, equable woman who took life smilingly, Annie McQueen had been shocked by this outrage. It was so wanton and cruel, so divorced from all morality. Shaken with horror, she had waited tremblingly for another blow to fall.

And into the picture this grim, hard young scoundrel, Haxon, had walked, lean and strong, with such conquering assurance. He had knocked out one of the raiders and sent the chief villain crashing pellmell through a window in a desperate hurry to escape. He had walked out of the house and killed another of the outlaws. After which, without a touch of fluttery nerves, he had tied up skilfully the wounds of her husband and Jim Stuart. There was something awesome about the handsome daredevil. Annie McQueen was still young enough to pluck a thrill from the romantic mystery that seemed to go with him. She hoped he would stay, at least until she was sure Lynch would not come back.

Out of the home paddock a man came running toward the house. At the same moment Mary McQueen came through the doorway to the porch. She called to her brother.

"Have you seen Vicky, Will?"

"Not since she ran from the room," the boy answered. "Isn't she in the house?"

"No. She must have hidden herself somewhere. Likely she is afraid to come out. You'd better call her and say it's all right now."

Blake was watching the running man. He moved like one in a hurry. Presently the bushranger made a discovery. The approaching man was Denis Roberts. But as he drew nearer the bushranger saw this was not the sick boy he had protected. He was a changed man. The face of the young fellow was bronzed. There were life and vigor in his movements.

Abruptly Roberts pulled up.

"You!" he cried.

"Right, Denis. Not expecting me, I take it?"

The young man looked from him to Mary and back again.

"Are you—?"

He got so far, and then stuck.

"Not this time. Have another guess." Blake grinned derisively. "I'm not going to tell you to bail up."

"He came to save us, not to rob us," Mary explained.

Roberts pushed that out of his mind for the moment and blurted out his news.

"Two men in the paddock caught Miss Victoria. One of them flung her on his horse. She screamed. I ran to them. The big man who had her in his arm shot at me. They galloped away."

Mary let out a little wail of despair.

Tom Halliday was coming out of the house. He had just finished giving aid to a groaning sufferer who had a badly lacerated back.

"What's up, Mary?" he asked.

"Lynch found Vicky hiding in the paddock and took her with him."

"My God!" the young man cried, staring at her.

"We've got to save her—somehow," Mary cried.

She spoke to Halliday and her brother as well as Blake, but it was to the outlaw her appealing eyes were directed.

The bushranger did not answer. He continued to smoke his pipe, as though he had not heard.

Mary waited, in a stress of anxiety. In that moment she was thinking less of Victoria than of him. He was on trial, at the bar of her judgment, none the less because this young Portia was passionately concerned about the issue. If he declined to help, if he let his sense of personal injury stand between him and the clear call to aid a woman in desperate need, Mary knew it would be a shock to her that would influence all her later thinking of him. He might justify a refusal to attempt a rescue of Victoria, on the ground that he owed her nothing, that she had failed him when his life was at stake. But Mary did not want even a legitimate excuse from him. Her heart demanded gener-

osity.

Swiftly he turned to Halliday.

"Can you have fresh horses run up for us? Ours are worn out. We'll need food. Don't suppose you have a black tracker about the shop, have you?"

"No. I'm going with you." Halliday put the question of remounts up to Will McQueen. "I'll ride my own horse. Can you muster some for Mr. Haxon and his men?"

"Yes. I'm going along too," Will announced.

Blake understood the look that Mary gave him. He shook his head.

"No. Some one has to stay at the station and look after the women and the wounded. That will be your job. These fellows might double back and bail you up again."

With this Will had to be content. It was not what he would have liked, but seventeen can not escape the indignities put upon it by the more mature.

The bushrangers ate their Christmas dinner while the horses were being mustered from the big paddock. With it they drank two bottles of port wine. Huge slices of plum pudding made the last course of a meal such as Blake had not sat down to since leaving England.

It was characteristic of the confidence Blake's men had in him that not one of them questioned his decision to hunt down Lynch. None of them would have felt it necessary to follow Lynch into the bush, but if that was what their chief wanted to do it was all right with them.

While the horses were being saddled Mary stood for a moment with the leader of the bushrangers on the porch. She looked at him, a little shyly. She wanted him to know without putting it into words how amazingly his coming had lifted their hearts out of terrified despair and what a warm glow there was in her bosom because he was riding into the bush to save Victoria if he could. Abruptly she managed, "Thank you"; then for fear he might think this a personal message, as it very much was, she added—

"I'm saying it for all of us."

"I'm a bit of a fool, aren't I?" he said lightly, in self-mockery. "What business have I to be playing constable and running down bushrangers? John Haxon speaking, with a thousand pounds on his head, dead or alive."

In spite of his cynicism she felt a deep stream of friendliness running from him to her. What comfort she could she drew from that. The gift she offered him was far less tepid. It was not the emotion of friendship that poured out of her soul to his like a molten flow from the crater of a volcano. He was the one man in her life. She was sure, as youth is always so sure, that no other could ever mean anything so deep and vital as he did.

He was curiously satisfying to her. His debonair picturesqueness thrilled her, just as did his daredevil impudence. She loved his strength, whether it was in swift action or banked behind his poised and cool indifference. If she was right—and she felt very certain she was—his personality was the fitting expression of a spirit worthy of all any woman could offer.

"You'll bring her back all right. I know you will."

She might have added, if she had wanted to give herself away, that he was the only man in the world who could have given her hope such a guarantee.

He shook his head.

"There's a million miles of bush back of us."

"And there's a God looking down on every yard of it."

His smile was ironic. Two years on the chain had not increased his faith in a personal God.

"You'd better pray to Him then."

"I shall, and I think He'll answer my prayers."

Looking into her softly shining eyes, it came to Geoffrey Blake that this plain girl was beautiful. Her vivid charm was of the spirit as well as of the flesh. It was born of the eagerness with which she ran out to meet all that was good and true. Out of the candid eyes moods flashed like sparkles of sunshine on rippling water.

"All ready," Halliday called across to Blake.

Since she had a word to say to Halliday she moved beside the outlaw toward the horses. There was, Blake thought, something notable in the way she

walked, as though life, the mere living, were beautiful beyond words.

"I just wanted to say, Tom, that I think Jim is going to get well," she told the squatter.

Halliday shook hands with her gratefully in farewell. He and Stuart were like Jonathan and David.

Mary watched the posse ride into the paddock.

CHAPTER XXVII

CAPTIVE

FROM the moment Lynch fastened his hungry little pig eyes on Victoria she was flooded with panic. Once or twice before she had seen that look on the face of a man, but never when he had the power to satisfy his appetite. This ruffian had the heavy, rounded shoulders, the low, retreating forehead, and the coarse, hairy skin of the gorilla type. Even while her mind darted here and there for a way of escape, the girl gave herself up for lost.

She saw Killough being taken to his punishment, after two of her friends had been shot down, and fear had so submerged her that she had no room in her heart to pity him. When the big bushranger ordered her to come to him Victoria's eyes flew to her friends for help. Tom Halliday nodded, ever so slightly. She did not know what he meant, but in that look she read some encouragement.

Reluctantly, as though Lynch dragged her by some invisible rope, she obeyed his harsh command, moving toward him tremulously with slow steps.

It was while she was passing the door that it opened to let some one into the room. Without seeing who was coming in she flew down the hall and out of the house. Every moment she expected to hear the crash of a revolver behind her.

Outside the house, she swerved sharply to the right. Through an open gate she ran into the home paddock. Before her stretched a sea of scrub. In it she might crouch down and find safety.

But she was flying when nobody pursued. She could not guess why Lynch had not followed her from the house instantly. It was not until she had reached the paddock that her back-flung glance caught sight of him, and then he did not seem to be looking for her. He was running toward the pound.

She dived farther into the brush. Her last look behind her showed half a dozen men, not closely packed but scattered. She heard the roar of guns, a shout, a curse, more shots. Still she ran, though bushes caught at her dress and tore it, though her lungs pounded with the strain put upon them. Not until she could run no farther did she stop.

The firing had died down. There came to her the pounding of horses' hoofs. Two riders were galloping through the scrub. They caught sight of her at the same moment she saw them, and both of them dragged their mounts to a halt. One leaped to the ground, handing his bridle rein to the other.

Victoria recognized the huge loutish figure lurching toward her. With a scream she turned to run. Before she had gone thirty yards a pair of heavy arms encircled her. She was snatched from her feet, carried back to the horses, and flung like a sack of meal across the back of one. Her captor mounted, lifted her into his arm, and followed his companion across the paddock.

She caught sight of a flock of sheep and a shepherd. In answer to her cry the herder ran toward the horses. The man who was holding her fired at him, then deflected his course in order not to be hampered by having to wade through a mob of sheep.

One of the bushrangers spoke to the other.

"Haxon got Hawkes," he said.

The leader swore. A string of savage curses poured from his hairy throat. His rage appalled the young woman.

"What about Billy?" Redruth asked.

Lynch growled out that he was probably a prisoner.

"We'll have to leave the Gap if Haxon has turned against us," Redruth said.

His chief indulged in more profanity.

Redruth had made a protest against the abduction of the girl at the time Lynch had picked her up in the paddock. He made another before they left the ten-mile block.

"Bad business, boss, dragging a wom-

an into it," he urged. "We're in deep now—up to our necks. No need for you to have shot those squatters. The back-blocks won't forget that. But if you hurt this woman—well, you heard what old McQueen said. They'll hunt us down with kangaroo dogs and tear us to pieces."

"Are you telling me what I can and can't do?" roared Lynch.

"I'm saying that we'd better drop her here," the other persisted doggedly. "My neck's as liable to be jerked as yours. I've got a right to talk. Fact is, our tails are in a crack. We've got to travel fast and far. She's in the road, a nuisance to have around. Why not be reasonable and admit it?"

"Want me to crack *her* neck now, do you?" Lynch asked angrily.

"No, I don't. I want you to drop her here. They'll find her all right."

"I won't do it."

"She's not in this, boss. If you hadn't gone off your head you'd see we can't bring her in without paying big for it. I don't like this business."

"She's mine, not yours. You haven't a thing to do with it. Don't try to bully me, Redruth, or you'll get what for." Lynch spoke with heavy finality.

"If you'll let me go I'll not tell," Victoria pleaded. "I'll beg them not to hunt you. I'll tell them how good you were to me."

She broke down with a sob of despair.

"I'm not going to let you go," Lynch told her with harsh obstinacy. "You're my woman, till I'm through with you. After that you can go, if I don't decide to knock you on the head," he added brutally.

Filled with self-pity, the girl wept. She was one of those women who have in them a magic that moves men. Bewitchingly seductive, with the soft loveliness that is exquisitely feminine, there was in her movements a warm, slow grace that made the blood of men hot. Yet in the big green eyes a deceptively appealing innocence demanded chivalrous protection. Always she had found this effective.

But now she had been snatched from the sheltered home life by the primordial brute. Her manner of childish and bewildered wistfulness would get her exactly nowhere with him. What he wanted he would take, ruthlessly, and if the fancy came to him, or if he thought his safety at stake, he would cut her throat as callously as he would that of a dingo.

THEY rode deep into the night. She had not the least idea of the direction in which they were going. They passed through long stretches of black gum, opening to small parks on the edge of which were mallee groves. Rolling hills and narrow gorges were traversed. From rocky spurs they looked down on stretches of land waves, weird and ghostly under the vast silence of the starlit semi-darkness.

With the coming of night her alarm increased. Victoria had specialized in graceful idleness. She had developed a fastidious instinct in regard to her person. There were men whose hands she did not like to touch. Those to whom she gave the favor of her kisses were very few. Yet this hairy scoundrel continually affronted her modesty by the way he took possession of her body. When he chose, he kissed her with savage ardor.

She felt her spirit die under his caresses, but no protest she could offer would matter one jackstraw to him.

At last he called a halt. He flung her from the saddle and dismounted. Without looking to see where she had fallen, he strode to a ti-tree and fastened the bridle rein.

"Hobble the horses, Redruth," he ordered. "We'll stay here an hour or so and let 'em graze."

As the lesser villain passed with the horses Victoria murmured a low imploring "Please!" to him. He made no answer, did not even look in her direction.

Lynch tied the girl to a gum tree, lay down a few feet from it and fell asleep. When Redruth returned she began to beg him, in a low voice that was almost a murmur, to save her from the other man.

"Save your breath to cool your porridge," the bushranger told her sullenly. "I'm not going to interfere."

"If you'd take me back to McQueen's station while he's asleep, all my friends

would work to get you a pardon," she promised. "I can see you're different from him. I'd make the governor see it too. I know him. My father has influence with those in power. So has my fiancé, Captain Killough. We'd all work hard for you."

"You needn't try to gammon me," he said roughly. "I know what kind of a pardon I'd get. If I'm taken it's Gallows Hill for me."

"If any—any harm comes to me he won't be the only one hanged for it," she told him. "You know that. You know they'll punish you too—horribly."

"Might as well stow your gaff, miss. I ain't listening," he said roughly. He was impressed by what she said and he did not want to be. "You fix it up with him. Any way that suits you two will be all right with me. I ain't in it. Not at all."

She began to sob, rocking to and fro against the rope that bound her.

"Are you going to let him—let him do whatever he wants to with me? You can't be so cruel."

"None of my business, I tell you."

He got up angrily and walked away. Twenty or thirty yards from her he lay down. Presently she could hear his snores.

Victoria was weary to exhaustion, both from long travel and from nervous tension induced by fear. She slumped back against the trunk of the tree, her feet in front of her and far apart. Strange though it seemed to her later, she slept brokenly and painfully, waking every few minutes with a start. Each time she came back from the world of sleep it was to feel again a dreadful sinking of the spirit as she realized her plight.

She pitied herself with entire abandon. What had she ever done to have fallen into the power of this dreadful creature who was more like a wild animal of the African forest than a human being? Any other girl, she felt with characteristic ego, could have endured such a fate so much more easily than she. Mary McQueen, for instance. Or even Nora McQuirk. They had been brought up in the rough life of a station. They knew how to shoot and even to ride mild buckjumpers. But she was so soft and feminine and dainty. It wasn't fair to let her be confronted with so terrible a situation.

When she was awake she wept piteously, scarcely trying to brace herself to fortitude. All her friends had deserted her, including the man she was to marry. God Himself had forgotten all about her. She was lost.

Before midnight the bushrangers saddled and were on their way. Victoria drooped with fatigue. She had been tied behind Lynch, and as the hours slipped away she leaned against the broad back of her captor and slept now and again for a few winks. At times she felt she would die of sheer weariness and muscular ache. Her tender flesh was not conditioned for such an experience.

They rested a second time. Because Victoria had become a dead weight on his hands Lynch let her lie down and sleep. She was awakened by being jerked roughly to her feet.

"When I call you, come running, missie," Lynch snarled, his bushy face thrust into hers.

She stared at him, coming back from dreams to distressing reality.

"I didn't hear you," she wailed. "I was asleep."

He slapped her cheek heavily with his open palm. The red marks of his hard fingers stood out on her face.

Victoria gave a cry, compounded of pain and fear. She shrank from him. A hand closed around her wrist and she was dragged forward.

"Don't you get tricky with me, you vixen," he snarled.

She was not only frightened; she was puzzled. His anger seemed to have sprung out of nothing. Why had he for no apparent cause grown suddenly furious at her? It did not occur to the girl that he was taking out on her his irritation at the temporary frustration of his desire to possess her. The presence of Redruth was confoundedly annoying. If the girl made a scene he would be likely to get his back up, and just now Lynch could not afford to quarrel with the only one of his men left. At the first chance he must get Redruth out of the way. After that, he would show her who was her master.

"Please—please!" she begged. "I'll do anything you say, if—if only—"

There was terror in her eyes, and he exulted in it.

"No ifs, missie. You're my gin. You'll come running when I snap my fingers. And when I want to give you the whip, you'll get it."

THE bottom had dropped out of her heart. All she had of beauty and daintiness meant nothing to him except one dreadful thing. She was no more to him than any gin he might pick up in the bush. Such words as respect or chivalry had no meaning for him any more than they would have for a jungle tiger.

They rode again. The light of dawn sifted into the dull sky. Above the horizon rose a molten ball of fire. The day was lifeless. A merciless sun beat down upon them. Whenever they stopped for a few moments clouds of gnats swarmed about their heads and the buzzing of mosquitos sounded in their ears. The soft flesh of the girl was raw and sore from rubbing against leather, her muscles ached, and her cheeks burned from wind and sun. She was persuaded she could not endure another minute without collapse.

Frequently the two men had consulted as to the best course to follow. Once more the question came up as to whether they dared turn aside into some place they called the Gap. That a posse must be hot in pursuit of them they knew. If Haxon had thrown in with the law he would guide the constables straight to their hiding place. The fugitives desperately needed food, fresh horses and other supplies. They had a cache, she gathered, at this rendezvous of theirs. But they were afraid to take a chance. It would mean the loss of hours, and the pursuit could not be many miles behind them.

Reluctantly they decided against the Gap, at a point on a dry river where the ways divided. They would have to try to stick up some sundowner and take his food from him. It was a bleak prospect, but the best that seemed to offer.

A couple of miles beyond the river Redruth had an inspiration. They had ascended from the valley to a rocky spit of land leading to a mountain spur. Here it would be almost impossible to follow tracks.

"Let's go down the rock chute and hide in the brush for two or three hours," he proposed. "If a posse reaches the river it will find an easy trail this way, but once it gets up into the rocks all the blokes can do is guess. We'll lie there and see if one passes, and if it does we'll double back to the Gap while it is still poking around looking for us in the hills."

Lynch made surly objections, but followed the advice given. It was sound enough. There was a very good chance that before nightfall the avengers would ride up that spur. A plain trail from the river would lead them there, but it would run out long before the hunted men took to the rock chute.

Along rocky outcrops of quartz strata they picked their way to the slide, then dismounted and led their horses down. Victoria clung fearfully to the pommel. At the end of a risky fifty yards they swung to the left and passed into an ironbark grove. Here they were securely hidden from the observation of anybody riding the ridge above, but could easily see from behind boulders any men ascending it.

Victoria sank down beside a clump of flannel flowers. She had wept until she could weep no more. There was no hope in her heart. Even fear was deadened by fatigue. She had prayed to God, as grown up children do, promising amendment if He would save her just this once. But God too had deserted her, she felt. Perhaps that was because she had deserted Geoffrey Blake, after she had already been a sinner with him. Maybe God was punishing her for the evil she had done.

She slept. When her eyes opened in terror, the big hand of Lynch was over her mouth. He was pointing a revolver at her heart.

"Don't make a sound—unless you want me to blow a blasted hole through you," he said.

She made no sound. Instead, she swooned.

TO BE CONCLUDED

BY PAUL ANNIXTER

THERE WERE GIANTS IN THOSE DAYS

IT WAS still very dark in the recesses of the great marsh that stretched for miles along the shores of the inland sea. Even the giant hunting lizard, with his red-lit, night-seeing serpent's eyes, could not be certain what the vast form that stirred in the depths of the cane brake might be. The breeze told him nothing, for he hunted mainly by sight and a sense of touch and hearing more acute than anything man can even imagine. But hearing, too, was out of the question. The great beast in the brake was silent as any other shadow round about. Likewise there were in the swamp's confines creatures which it did not behoove even Cerotosaurus, the huge, carnivorous lizard, to spring upon.

The prowler waited, torn between lust and caution, circling stealthily through the tangled water growths. All of thirty feet high they were, but mere weeds and rushes in those parts. For a space the dense mist and the dripping stillness held sway.

Finally the killer, whose hunting had been curtailed for two nights by a gibbous moon, decided to chance it.

The great kangaroo-like hind legs of the saurian gathered beneath him; through the reeds there was a fearsome slithering rush which the finest stopwatch would have timed as almost zero. Ensued a pandemonium of threshing and tumult in the mist swathed blackness, as of things gone decidedly wrong—and some of them for Cerotosaurus.

The thing that had been lying there acknowledged receipt of the rush with an explosion of roaring and bellowing and the heaving upward of a vast, nightmarish bulk which quickly gave away the identity of its tribe, even before the fitful moonlight glinted wetly on a vast eight-foot head surmounted by long, scimitar-like horns. Only stubborn, pig-headed old Three Horns—scientifically known as D. Tricerotops, and nature's first rough draft idea by way of a rhinoceros—would have thought of coming up fighting under the attack of this dread killer, who belonged to the ruling reptile clan.

For a full minute thereafter it was much as if a slow firing mine had gone off there in the heart of the primeval bush. The giant carnivore had landed full upon the back of the sleeper, securing an instantaneous five-ply death grip, counting his fanged jaws and each armed foot studded with dragon-like claws. Old Three Horns, however, though only one of the herbivorous dinosaurs, mild and harmless by temperament, was one of the most wonderful defensive organisms in all nature. From the low-hung, shapeless head of the beast the skull extended backward and up to form a great frill or ruff of bone about the neck which, together with an amazingly thick hide covered with blunt spines, served as a coat of mail.

So it was that the terrible weapons of the lizard made little impression on the monster's horny back. Had he known at first it was old Three Horns who lay there, it is doubtful whether Cerotosaurus would have launched his attack.

But wrath would not now let him retreat. Twice and thrice he released his hold and sprang in again, rearing and rending, but it availed him little save to madden him further by the tantalizing scent of spilled blood. He was up against a Tricerotops, the pluckiest of all the tree browsers of those times, on whom bluff and prestige went for nothing.

Abruptly then came sounds as of a fresh explosion to the rear, and something like a spent shell came boring through the bush straight toward the center of tumult. Another Tricerotops, old Three Horns's mate, no less. The soggy ground shook beneath her as she came. Fair upon the long crocodile tail of the lizard trod the second monster, and fell to goring and snorting like a steam engine struggling up a grade. And that was enough for Cerotosaurus. Hissing like a great cat, he sprang aside without shame and went plunging away through the mist in search of easier prey.

For a moment old Three Horns stood, swaying like a cruiser in a ground swell, watching the retreat of Cerotosaurus, then he turned to his enraged mate.

FOR some time thereafter there was a deal of snorting, whistling and blasting in the dense brake. It was merely Three Horns and his mate voicing their wrath as they ramped back and forth in reflex excitement. In the faint moonlight that played fitfully through the mist the pair loomed up mountainous and unreal as chimeras.

Not that they needed any magnifying whatever, their actual proportions being quite startling enough. With a height of nearly eleven feet, old Three Horns boasted a length of fully thirty-five. His long formless head, not unlike the prow of a gunboat, armored and hook-beaked, carried three long horns atop it, two rising from his forehead close to the small pig-like eyes, and a third from the snout. Each of these was over three feet of spiked death for any creature rash enough to incur his slow wrath. With these measurements, plus the weight of the beast, which was something over two tons, one begins to get the picture. Yet Three Horns was by no means among the largest of his tree browsing kind. Truly there were giants in those days.

Anon the red sun unbarred the gates of morning; and as the night mists swirled and lifted, the weird antediluvian daytime life of the marsh began to manifest itself. There were surreptitious rustlings, sudden startled crashes, swift patterings, snorts and thuds as vast and unguessed forms began to issue from their lairs of the night.

From the depths of a great tree near old Three Horns there came a serpent-like hissing, followed by a harsh and vitriolic screech. It was Archæopteryx, the First Bird, raucously greeting the day with what passed with him for song. An insufferable egotist was Archæopteryx, doubtless because he was a new experiment and there was only one of him, the first serpent to sprout wings and conquer the realm of air. About the size of a crow he was, and trailed a serpentine tail behind him that was longer than his body and covered with feathers.

From a nearby branch he shouted down at old Three Horns and his mate, a strident outburst of parrot-like abuse,

then launched into the air and went gliding away in slow dipping flight above the canes.

As for old Three Horns and his madame, they were aroused enough without any insults, thank you. That predawn stirring up of theirs, it appeared, was permanent. Also it had played a queer trick upon the pair. It had brought them together again, joggling the trend of their plans and days, leaving them fretful and stewing in the growing dawn.

The effete pair, be it known, had not been living together for some three or four weeks. The reason was that Madame Three Horns had been involved in preparations for a diminutive half-ton offspring, during which the presence of her attentive but dull witted spouse would have been an added complication.

Old Three Horns, though in no wise a romantic character, was for all that a solid, dependable citizen, eminently respectable, and had remained hard by, keeping himself assured that Madame T. Horn was well cared for—that she had not been bogged down in the quagmire, strangled by giant serpents, or fallen prey to the arch-enemy of all creatures of those parts—Tyrannosaurus, the giant lizard who was acknowledged master over all living things in this Age of Reptiles.

And so this morning they had come together again—quite opportunely, too, the madame having awakened in the thickets nearby and plunged to the aid of her spouse in his battle with Cerotosaurus. Possibly because Cerotosaurus so closely resembled his gigantic relative, the tyrant king, the reflex of that night attack was slow to wear off.

The upshot was that the vast pair had decided to leave those parts, at once and together. That was before dawn. But it took some two hours of mulling and snorting before thought came to action in the dim prehistoric minds of the two, which were as slow as the age in which they lived. Therefore the marsh mists had risen like steam from a stew before the two great beasts were on their way.

They departed into the red, molten eye of the rising sun, which presumably was east in those dim and steamy times as it is today. For some hours they trekked, following the edge of the grim and forbidding swampland. Their pace was a marathon one for beasts of their proportions. And now was to be seen something of the wonderful manner in which nature had specialized them. They turned aside for nothing, boring through entanglements of barbed thorn bush, bristling with dagger-like spikes and espaliers upon which most beasts would have left half the flesh they owned.

STRANGE and fearsome were the marsh dwellers they encountered on their way. Once there came plunging out of the brake perhaps the strangest form nature ever turned loose upon the planet—a scaly, horny monster that resembled a giant turtle with elephantine legs and a double row of flat plates set on edge all down its back. On its legs and sides were crimson marks as if a grapnel had fouled it; and it growled and hissed in evident terror of something on its trail. There was no vestige of a cranium atop its grotesquely small head, and its little dull eyes were so myopic that it blundered head-on into the trunks of the trees. It was a Stegosaurus, perhaps the most harmless and dull witted of all the browsers.

Again they passed a high knoll overlooking the marsh where a band of pterodactyls, giant winged lizards, were hissing and clacking as they crawled about sunning themselves. Scarce able to navigate on the ground, the ungainly creatures had to drag themselves about. But from time to time one of them would launch itself into the air from the edge of the knoll and go flapping off in bat-like zigzag flight above the marsh. Repulsive and ugly they were, great carnivorous reptiles, with leathery wings that spread full twenty feet across.

Oh, there was life aplenty in the region of the great swamp, life so strange that it was like some realm out of nightmare. Mostly it was reptilian, crawling, creeping, leaping and swimming forms, diminutive as well as gigantic. Some were lizard-like, some fish-like, others bat-like. Some were like nothing so

much as animated arboreal or vegetable growths. And fecundity there was more than a name. It was a menace, a besetting force. The breeze dropped some seeds or pods to earth, and within a matter of days creeping, twining growths had sprung from the oozy soil and the number of them were strangling one another in their profusion.

THE sun they kept in those days to parboil all life and vegetation, had reached the zenith and turned the jungle into a breathless, dripping hothouse, with condensed steam for breathing, by the time the two resumed their march. Just the day, though, for a Tricerotops, providing water was handy. But it was just the day, too, for old Zeuglodon, the king of all serpents.

Down to the shore of a broad swampy lake came Three Horns and his mate to bathe a bit and feast on water growths, stepping carefully for fear of sink holes which would bog them down. And it was here, as it happened, Zeuglodon was basking that day, having swum in along a winding waterway from the sea which was his usual haunt.

No one in those parts knew how old or how long Zeuglodon was. Few had ever been close to him and been suffered to tell of it; certainly none had ever lived to measure him. It is safe to say, however, that he taped over one hundred feet. The original sea serpent, science has called him—though he wasn't really a serpent at all, having two short, paddle-shaped legs on his forward end. Half submerged in the muddy shallows of the lake, he had lain throughout the morning, the great gray and leaf-brown mass of him so in and out of the tessellated light and shadows that none knew he was there at all.

As Three Horns and his mate waded into the lake and drank they failed to catch the heavy reek of stale musk that hung in the air; and because their horns were forever getting in the way of their little eyes they did not see the swirling currents in the water hard by. As the female dipped her muzzle to drink, a great shiny head with pointed snout came gliding toward her; and some thirty feet of the tail and body of the great mosasaur rose into view. There was a mighty bellowing, a chaos of flying water as a cable-like length of the serpent's body was flung about the head of the drinker. Apparently old Zeuglodon attacked without due thought. Equally apparently, having once seized upon anything, he was too cantankerous or cold blooded to let go. By no possible stretch of the imagination could he hope to constrict Madame Three Horns into table fare. Yet he grimly set about drowning her.

Only one mistake the scaly nightmare made. Certainly he must have seen Three Horns in the background, wallowing on his side in the shallows. But that would not have mattered had the water been of sufficient depth. But it wasn't; and once out of deep water he was robbed of half his black arts of leverage and peristaltics.

As it was, it was not beyond the depth of old Three Horns. At the first uproar he heaved himself upward on his short stumpy legs. His eyes turned into small dull coals. Then he rushed.

The serpent acknowledged the charge with a mighty writhing and hissing—and no wonder. Something over two tons in weight had pinned him down and was stamping his nether portion into the mud.

The forward part of its body inflating hideously like a balloon, the serpent lashed and whipped the waters to a consistency of soda and milk. Its armored horny head rearing far aloft till it overhung its attacker, it struck again and again with dizzying rapidity. Its eyes were shot now with ruby lights, the rows of curved teeth in its long jaws tearing like a hundred daggers.

But the hide of old Three Horns was of the pachyderm kind. Impervious, he continued to gouge, rip and stamp. Then his chance came. His own great jaws opened like an iron-spiked portcullis, and closed with a grunt, hollow as a tomb, upon the serpent's spine.

Champing foam and rage, bellowing deep subterranean challenges to any further enemies that might be lurking near, Three Horns squired his wife up from the muddy margin of the lake and the two of them decamped, like some seismic disturbance, into the scenery.

THE scene had changed utterly, when some eight days later we next pry into the doings of the monster pair. The mists and marshes of the lowlands had been left behind. Along dry, sparsely wooded hillsides tall spired trees grew, very different from the wet, sprawling growths of the swamps.

Came a great snorting and thudding in a stretch of dense woodland, a sound as of the uprooting of earth, and several treetops were seen to shiver. Then old Three Horns suddenly broke from cover and stood forth in the open sunlight. His mate followed close behind him. After her came running a snuffly little creature that was an exact but comical replica of the old ones in every way. It was a diminutive, newborn Tricerotops, only five days old. It was he who was the main reason for the long journey to this remote spot. For what with their many carnivorous enemies of the marshlands, the chances were a thousand to one that the little one would never have survived the first few weeks of its life.

Down the hillside the trio moved into a broad, grassy ravine, the youngster grunting and stumbling on its short, pestle-like legs as it strove to keep up with its mother. Where the grass was longest and thickest the family fell to grazing like cattle, cropping in the greenest places and rooting up tender and succulent shoots.

They had frequented this place before, and by degrees had come to love the drier, cleaner range. For they were perhaps of all creatures the closest approach to the red-blooded mammal form that nature had produced to date in that reptilian age. Here, in this comparative sanctuary, where the lower saurian life rarely came, they were of a mind to remain until the calf was of a size to fend for itself.

But fate, or destiny, is a grim and humorless jade, refusing to let any one or any thing alone, even a respectable old Tricerotops pair, minding their young and their own business. Just now she was up to one of her usual tricks of testing the fibers of her worthiest through adversity. She had picked on this spot from the beginning to put old Three Horns through a final initiation that would temper his metal to the utmost.

As the family fed and rooted the old bull managed to keep always just to leeward for safety's sake, so that a single snort or squeal would bring him charging up at a moment's notice. Quick was his seeing power for a distance of a hundred feet or so but, as has been set forth, his sense of scent rated about C-minus. So he had failed utterly to detect the approach of a giant form along the wooded hillside. It was not until a vast creature rose up on its hind legs at the edge of the woods to peer, no more than two hundred feet away, that old Three Horns wheeled about with a sharp, explosive grunt that signaled danger.

Of all the grim monsters that trod the earth even in that far off Age of Reptiles, the most terrible was this one, the gigantic carnivorous lizard known as Tyrannosaurus rex, "King of the Tyrant Lizards". He was not unlike a kangaroo in general appearance—a kangaroo, however, nearly fifty feet long, and carrying its head a good twenty-five feet above the ground as it traveled.

Seven thousand pounds in weight, incredibly agile, stronger and swifter than any other creature, more savage than any tiger, this monster was truly the nemesis, the abiding nightmare of every other living thing.

The front legs of the creature were small and weak in proportion to the ponderous overdevelopment of its rear ones. Each of its four feet was armed with three great claws like war sickles. But it was the powerful four-foot jaws, studded with rows of stabbing and cutting teeth rising four to five inches above the jawbone, that left ordinary prey no room for argument and made of the monster the most terrible killing machine the planet has known. A ponderous, crocodile-like tail some twenty feet long served to balance him as he hopped and bounded over the ground; but so great was the strength of the beast that he carried that tail as lightly as a peacock's fan.

Sheer chance this day had drawn him far from his usual haunts in the lowlands, but as he made out the browsing

Tricerotops in the valley below him, his serpent's eyes took on a horrible, ember-like glow of lust and anticipation. Single purposed at all times, he wasted no time in stalking the prey, but burst noisily from the forest and sped straight toward the grazing family. And old Three Horns, seeing him come, knew at the outset what was in store. The thing he had dreaded most all his life was upon him at last.

It was the Tricerotops's calf, strayed a short way from its parents, that was the objective of the Tyrant's initial rush. But old Three Horns had seen the intent, and without hesitation he pivoted about in the same instant and sped to the youngster's rescue. Clumsily he ran, yet with an amazing speed for so unwieldy a bulk, putting forth the utmost that was in him. It was booked, however, that the calf should fall a sacrifice that day before the very eyes of its parents.

The great lizard, whose agility was ten times that of old Three Horns, covered the intervening distance with the speed of a whirlwind, forty full feet at a bound, its fangs gleaming from its open jaws, its long neck thrust forward. Before the dull-witted youngster was rightly aware of the swooping death, he was struck down. Instantly the killer began tearing ravenously at the still quivering carcass. But a brief instant only did he sate his hunger.

Before he had bolted his first mouthful, the cumbersome bulk of old Three Horns barged into him head-on. The impact of the thing was appalling. The shock of those two vast bodies meeting shook the very ground. Ensued then one of the most awe-inspiring spectacles ever staged by nature—the prolonged test of strength and endurance of two of the mightiest creatures the planet has produced.

TO AN onlooker the battle would have seemed absurdly unequal at the outset. It was a forty-eight foot beast against a thirty-five; one, moreover, possessed of ten times the agility and far greater strength than the other. The issue, however, was in grave doubt; for from the first half minute the sullen, armor-plated bulk of old Three Horns made the promise of the larger beast's victory seem sinister.

Incredulous at first that this peaceful browser was really precipitating an attack upon him, the Tyrant had made no move to avoid the other's rush; nor until they were at close grips did he realize that it was indeed a battle to the death. Never before had he dreamed that such fury lay dormant in cud-chewing old Three Horns. Truth was, Three Horns himself had never dreamed that anything like this was in him, until he had witnessed the slaughter of his calf. Instantly thereafter the blood seemed to turn to lava in his veins; a killing madness trickled like acid in his brain, compared to which his life and limbs became of no more value to him than the dead leaves underfoot.

Terrible in his aroused fury, the great saurian reared to his full height, and flung his entire weight upon the low raking bulk of his attacker. With any other beast that would have ended the struggle then and there; but somehow the short, tree-like legs of old Three Horns did not buckle under that tremendous onslaught. Nor did his formidable armor fail him now.

The great jaws of the lizard sought the neck of his foe, in an effort to sever the backbone and end the struggle. But the heavy frill of bone aforementioned, which extended backward from the Tricerotops's skull, was a perfect protection; the worrying fangs clashed harmlessly upon this and at the same time old Three Horns, pivoting almost like a beetle on a pin, rammed his long front horn fair through the foreleg of his attacker.

Screaming with pain, the Tyrant made the mistake of going berserk and grappling with the foe. In so doing he lost the great advantage of superior height, weight and agility, at the same time taking on desperate odds. For the beast which infought with a Tricerotops, regardless of its size, was accepting a mighty handicap. But the arrogance of kingship and the mania of pain and rage had robbed the great saurian of all reason.

Again and again his jaws slashed at

the other beast's back, twice lifting a long strip of leathery skin and tearing loose a mass of quivering flesh which hung dripping down the other's side. The raging Tricerotops, however, seemed not even to sense the terrible wounds.

Finally the Tyrant, literally riding his ramping antagonist's back, seized one of the Tricerotops's rear horns in the clamp of his terrible jaws and, exerting his titanic strength to the utmost, tore it out by the roots. As the horn ripped away, a mass of flesh pulsating redly at its roots, the saurian toppled backward. Unchecked by the agony just endured, old Three Horns saw an opening and seized it, swinging under the other's belly and lifting as he swung with his two remaining horns, puncturing the monster's chest.

Snarling and hissing like some great tiger, the blood gushing from the two gaping wounds over the already bloody head of the other beast, the saurian tore himself loose and bounded free, snapping off two young trees at their bases as his hindquarters crashed against them. It seemed to have dawned on him all at once that victory for him lay in a slashing in-and-out fight, in which his greater speed and resiliency could be brought to bear.

And so began the cruel game of ripping and dodging which would inevitably wear down his slower antagonist. Sluggish old Three Horns sensed the new purpose, knew it to be the beginning of the end, but he refused to quit. Uncouth, far, far down the scale of life, he was; yet his kind marked a distinct step in advance of the cold blooded lizard kind. For in him was that spark of love, unknown in the true reptile world, which lays down its life for mate or offspring. It was that alone which carried on that day, long after mere ferocity failed.

Great bars of livid red stood out on the sides of both beasts now. At times their massive bodies locked again in a monumental threshing, heaving tangle that ground the underbrush to splinters beneath them and trampled the blood soaked ground into red mud. Again the lizard would circle round and round, his long-fanged jaws grinning horribly, his head striking downward again and again with the dazzling rapidity of a snake.

Three Horns began to stagger. More than a half hour that struggle had gone on, and plainly only a few more minutes would the old warrior be able to stand under the killing strain. The madame had lunged in now to his aid, but the saurian with his astounding agility easily eluded her clumsy rushes, concentrating his onslaught on the bull.

Finally as the foe tottered visibly and blundered against a treetrunk, the Tyrant gathered himself for the rush that would end it. The impact of his full-weight pounce, incalculable in its force, took old Three Horns square in the side. He collapsed; the killer overrode him, jaws thrusting downward like giant shears for a final spine-hold.

Mad with agony under the torture of those crushing jaws, Three Horns lay writhing on his side, head flung back and up. Crash! Something like a landslide had smashed fair into the Tyrant's stern. It was the madame, whose presence the fighters had ignored. By sheerest chance as he heaved his bulk away from the onslaught, the saurian's belly was exposed. With a terrible sidewise, upward twist of his head, old Three Horns drove his two remaining weapons deep into the monster's entrails. Almost simultaneously his mate lunged in again from leeward, all three horns at point. Then the pair of them, working in horrible unison, ripped and gored and heaved and twisted. Foredoomed, the Tyrant writhed and fought to the last ounce of his strength; but he could not free himself, being spitted from two sides. Then Death, the supreme referee, called the battle off.

Red and tottering and hardly recognizable, Three Horns gained his feet and moved slowly toward the sheltering forest, a terrible apparition in the eye of the setting sun—but victorious. The record of his epic battle is preserved to this day in Cretaceous rock. You and I, too, had a share in his victory. For the thing that had won was that flaming courage which has made the mammal master of the earth—that loyalty and love of kind which alone overthrew the reptile rule and brought us up to now.

My First Russian Bear

By BORIS N. KAMYSHANSKY

THROUGH densely growing underbrush I could just see an open space surrounded by bright green young firs and white birches. The snow, hard packed under my feet, spread in a deep layer over the clearing and shone in the sun. My black mongrel twin dogs, small but wiry, pulled at their joint leash and looked askance at me. At the far end of the clearing, the stumpy roots of a fallen giant fir protruded from a snow mound. From under the black roots a tiny stream of vapor marked the breathing hole of the bear den.

With my forked birch pole—*rogatina*—a hatchet and my two small dogs I was ready to meet my first Russian bear in solitary combat.

For the past two months I had been engaged in my initial training as a bear hunter under the skilful direction of Koozma, the veteran bear-man of Tver. He had downed his thirty-ninth bear and was doubtful whether or not to disregard the superstition and chase his fortieth. The fortieth bear is supposed always to kill the hunter.

In the meantime Koozma was glad to teach me his special art; and thus, every day for two months, Koozma impersonated the bear and I the hunter. I would take my position in the deep snow with my back to the sun. In my right hand I had a thirty-inch stick which represented an ax; and with my left hand I pointed my six-foot *rogatina* at Koozma, the butt of the *rogatina* resting on the ground against my right foot.

Two hundred and sixty pounds of Koozma pushed, pressing and dancing against the prongs of the fork in an attempt to dislodge me; his bearish arms waved in the air, aiming to paw my stick, my arms, and to tear off my hat. At last I succeeded in striking at Koozma's head with my stick strongly enough for his taste. He proudly pronounced me ready to risk the bear.

In the late Fall a she-bear had been trailed from a killed sheep, and her preparations for a Winter den were spied out. I was now ready to dislodge her. I emerged on the clearing, my shadow, sharply outlined on the gleaming snow, pointing straight at the bear den.

Released from the leash, my two black mongrels barked ecstatically, jumped on the snow mound and began to dig around the breathing hole. In a few moments a brown paw struck from under the snow; with a yelp both dogs leaped away, only to return and hang with their teeth to the long brown fur. A second paw appeared, lashing at the dogs. Then out came a brown head, yawning and trying to open its eyes against the blinding sun. Both dogs tore at the woolly ears, dancing to avoid the massive paws. The bear came half out, plowing a path through the snow. She surveyed the clearing, struck at the dogs, then fixed her stare in my direction.

Growling, with raised forelegs she wabbled nearer and nearer. I caught her middle with my fork. The struggle began; it was not Koozma now, and I felt the difference. If I should slip, my fate would surely be death—at the least a hard blow on my head, which is nearly the same thing. But my dogs worried the bear, biting at her hind legs and pulling at her fur everywhere. Then, when her left paw swung down to strike the dogs, I had my opening.

With my ax I delivered a blow to the right temple of that grizzly head. Blood streamed from the wound, but I did not know whether the blow was fatal. She was still pressing on the *rogatina*, still aiming her paws at me, giving me no chance to strike again. Either of us might be the victim. She growled; then, staggering, she came down. In a couple of minutes she was dead.

Banana HERDER

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

PROFESSOR Nicholas Zorick arrived in Central America with letters from the third vice-president of the fruit company. The letters indicated that he was a plant pathologist from Harton University intent on investigating the peculiarities of the genus *Musa* when cultivated for profit, as well as the habits and functions of other flora on and about banana plantations.

The professor's arrival coincided with the rise of a river capable of flooding some fifty square miles of bananas—a phenomenon more immediately vital to the personnel of the division than the scientific improvement of the species. However, since the professor came accredited, he was hurried from the port to the division manager at Platanera, who passed him on to the superintendent of agriculture, who quickly sent him out to Jim Egan.

Egan was overseer at Blazco Farm at the end of the farthest branch of the company's private railway system. The farm was near the Honduranian border and the ultimate point from which fruit could be cut and rushed to the refrigerated hold of a steamer before starting to ripen. The superintendent of agriculture said afterward that he had sent the professor to Blazco at his own request to see a new plantation nearest virgin jungle, a request easily explained by the events that followed. He had obviously not picked Blazco because he thought that Egan was the ideal host for a plant pathologist on the loose. And Egan was by no means overjoyed at the prospect of entertaining the professor.

Not that Egan was surprised at the task assigned him. He had been in the tropics long enough to know that a banana farmer is considerably more than a man who merely grows, harvests and ships bananas. In order that a bunch of golden fruit may hang in the corner grocery at Jinksville, Iowa, the overseer must be a very versatile man.

Egan mumbled something about having no time to play nursemaid to bald headed professors when the river was getting ready to act up, but he appeared rather philosophical when Clark, the broad, squat district superintendent, brought Zorick around at lunch time.

Egan shook hands with the plant pathologist on the veranda. He loomed a full two heads above Zorick's bald spot as he said—

"Howdy, Prof."

Egan had had slight experience with professors before; he had attended a small Southern college for one football season, but left in a huff when some of his professors intimated that higher education should be tempered with an interest in such academic subjects as English composition and calculus.

Consequently, there was nothing collegiate about Jim Egan; rather there was an indescribable cowboy look about him as he stood before Zorick in his five-gallon hat, high boots and the green flannel shirt which he swore kept the heat out, rather than in. His nose was narrow and slightly beaked. He greeted the professor with a perceptible Texas drawl. His lips, thin but good humored, smiled a little more on one side than the other, as if it were too much of an effort to smile on both sides of the face at once.

In fact, all of Egan's movements gave the impression that they were designed to save effort. His associates claimed that the only reason Egan had the most equable temper in the division was because he was too lazy to get his back up.

After lunch Egan sent the professor out to ride the farm with Jessop, his earnest, red headed young timekeeper. Jessop had a face and a studious manner that ought to go well with professors. Besides, Egan himself wanted to ride along the river to have another look at the levees, as the high water had already begun to back up into the drainage ditches.

Egan was taking a shower before dinner when Jessop came in to tell him about the professor.

"I showed him where the bananas grow only fifteen feet tall and where they grow thirty," said Jessop. "I rode him out to the edge of the jungle. I don't believe he was the least interested. He asked what kind of shooting we did around here. I told him we occasionally took a potshot with side arms, but that Gladstone, the Jamaican foreman, did the only serious hunting; that you furnished the ammunition and Gladstone was supposed to bring us game. So nothing would do but I had to take him around to the labor camp to see Gladstone."

AT DINNER the plant pathologist again seemed more interested in things other than roots and leaves. Toying with his small mustache, he asked repeated questions about some obscure Maya ruins in the jungle on the frontier—ruins too unimportant to interest archeologists and too inaccessible to interest tourists. He wanted to know where one might strike the trail, how far it was, how the going was and whether it was true that a band of outlaws had their headquarters there. Egan, who had been most of the way to the ruins with a surveying party once, answered his questions.

After dinner Professor Zorick transferred his attention to Egan's Scotch whisky, displaying an interest that was more than academic. The three men went to bed at ten-thirty, which is late on a banana farm.

At midnight a phone call from Clark, the district superintendent, routed Egan reluctantly from his bed. Upstream observers had reported another two-foot rise of the river at Santa Paula, said Clark. The new high water would reach the banana farms in six to eight hours with higher water later, since it was still raining heavily in the highlands. The levees had to be built up accordingly.

Egan got into action. He was not precisely a human dynamo. His movements were as deliberate and his drawl as unexcited as ever. Yet his blue eyes, pink rimmed from his sudden awakening, shone with a steely gleam under his long,. brown, almost feminine lashes. Egan was indisputably lazy; but once his initial inertia was overcome he was capable of much work. He piled out Jessop, woke the mule boy, roused the Jamaican foreman by phone. Then he climbed on a mule and rode to the camp to see that the native contractors turned out a full supply of labor.

Egan knew that the division engineer would be busy downstream, where washouts on the company's main line would disrupt the whole system of fruit distribution. If the river came ashore at Blazco Farm, all it could do would be to blight fifty thousand banana plants and wash out the light thirty-pound rails of the branch railway and feeder lines for the mule trams. Egan would have to depend on himself to protect his own farm. It would be expected of him. The superintendent of agriculture had a theory that one overseer should be the equal of any two rivers.

At three in the morning a work train came through with the shovels, bags, and thirty men.

At dawn the river was within eighteen

inches of the top of the levee and had started to undercut the bank. Egan decided to sacrifice the strip of plantation along the bank in the hope of saving the rest of his farm. The idea was originally Jessop's. Jessop was always full of theories, but Egan appropriated only the best ones. He would build a new levee fifty yards, perhaps a hundred yards, from the river, ready to hold back the water when the flood had either topped or cut away the present dike.

By eight in the morning two hundred men from the Blazco labor camp were filling sand bags. Fruit cutters, backers, ditch men, checkers—every available hand was on the job.

At noon Egan rode back to his bungalow to rest for an hour and to report to Platanera that the river was still rising, but that he still had a farm. He was momentarily surprised to see Professor Zorick on his veranda. He had forgotten that he had an official guest.

"I guess I'm kind of neglecting you, Professor," drawled Egan, "but the river's kicked over the traces on us. Maybe this is just what you're looking for. In a few days you'll be able to watch how a couple of thousand banana plants turn brown and droop when they've had water standing on their toes for forty-eight hours."

"Don't bother about me," said Zorick. "I'll keep busy. Maybe I'll borrow Gladstone's rifle and do a little hunting."

"Gladstone don't like to lend his rifle," said Egan. "He's jealous of it like it was a pretty girl. And it ain't even a good gun. He's funny that way."

"Oh, well, there's no hurry," said Zorick. "I'll stay around here until the daily press bulletin comes up."

"We don't get copies up here," said Egan.

"I took the liberty of making arrangements at the Tropical Radio station in Puerto Justo," Zorick explained. "Fussy of me, I suppose, but I must keep abreast of the news. They're sending the press sheets up to me. The district superintendent's motor is supposed to bring them."

Zorick resumed his study of a map of the region.

Egan got two hours' sleep before the phone rang to inform him that the division engineer had changed his strategy and was moving his base of operations to Blazco Farm.

By five o'clock that afternoon the river had cut away part of the original levee and was making quick work of the rest. Egan's second line of defense was holding.

Clark, the district superintendent, was on the scene to explain the new plan of action.

"You're to transfer operations to the other bank," said Clark. "The engineers want to dig a new channel for the river to see if we can't divert some of the flood waters to the south fork."

"I got less than two hundred men," said Egan, "and they've been working eighteen hours with almost no rest. How do you expect—"

"Cheer up, banana herder," said Clark, slapping Egan on the back. "It's all in a good cause. On account of your good work the flappers in Far Rockaway won't have to do without banana splits this Summer."

Egan crossed the river—a broad, swift, brown torrent, swirling and boiling furiously as it carried along uprooted trees, great *manaca* palms, broken banana stalks, overturned cayugas, the swollen carcass of a mule. He landed on the black silt *playa* of the opposite bank, once favorite basking place of alligators, now swept by coffee colored foam. There was not an alligator to be seen.

By dark, there were five hundred men working on the other side of the river. Egan, black with mud, was in the thick of them. He was surprised to find that Gladstone, his foreman, was not around. By inquiry he found that Gladstone had gone home just before work had been shifted from the other bank and had apparently not returned. Egan supposed he would be along later. Five hundred more men were being brought from all parts of the division, carried as close to the river as the work trains dared to venture on the waterlogged roadbeds. Launches, towing lighters full of men and shovels, fought their way across the mad current, dodging ceiba trees and other floating battering rams that came charging down the stream.

Egan was vaguely worried about Glad-

stone. The foreman was not a man to shirk his job. Something might have happened to him. Things do happen to Jamaican foremen. They antagonize a labor contractor, or get into a row over the butchering concession. Egan had seen a Jamaican chopped in a machete fight two years previous . . . He sent a man back across the river to look for Gladstone. The man came back in an hour with no news. Egan's fears were pushed to one side by the press of work.

The night was filled with the hoot of work trains sliding cautiously through the bananas toward the river. Improvised flares marked the mile and a half of channel that was to be dug before morning. The wavering light from the torches glistened ruddily on naked, sweating torsos, bending to shovels. Egan himself took a shovel from the hands of an exhausted *mozo*. A blast of dynamite provoked a panic of chattering monkeys and shrieking birds in the adjoining jungle.

AN HOUR before dawn the river rushed frothing, gurgling and hissing into its new man-made bed.

An hour after dawn both the new bed and the old bed were nearly stagnant lagoons, idly reflecting the pale gold of the early sun, still swathed in morning mists. New broad black *playas* stretched up from the strangely shrunken watercourse, affording bigger and better basking grounds for the long-jawed alligators, already crawling out to lie stretched at their full greenish length to await the heat of day.

With the sudden contrariness of a capricious woman, the swollen tropical river had spurned its new channel and abandoned its old, to break through elsewhere and settle in an entirely new course—a shallow reach several miles away overland. In any event, the company's main line was saved and a million stems of fruit were preserved from water blight. Work trains chugged through the rescued plantations to take the peons back to their respective camps, and Jim Egan went home to stumble, fully dressed, on to his bed.

He did not know until eight o'clock in the morning that Professor Nicholas Zorick was missing.

It took the pockmarked, bowlegged houseboy five minutes to wake Egan. The boy was persistent, because Egan was always difficult to arouse. He paid no attention to the overseer's drowsy profanity. Señor Clark was on the phone. It was important.

"Where is Professor Zorick?" the district superintendent wanted to know when Egan had dragged himself to the instrument.

"In bed, probably," drawled Egan, "like all sensible people."

"Ask him what time he wants me to send the motor for him. He's expected at Platanera today."

Egan was away from the phone for a minute. When he returned he said—

"I can't seem to locate the professor."

"Find him, then," said Clark. "He's your guest. Find him and call me back."

"All right, I'll find your plant astrologist for you," said Egan as he hung up.

But he did not find him. No one around the house had seen him. The cook said she thought she had heard him moving about before daylight. The stock man had not seen him, but he reported that there was a mule missing.

Egan swore as he got his big frame into motion to trace his guest. A damned nursemaid, that's what he was. The professor was more trouble than the river.

He rode down the tracks toward the labor camp and opened doors in the long yellow building that housed the tired *mozos*. He found no trace of Zorick. He rode to the next farm. All he got here was sleepy curses. He continued to the next labor camp. The district was asleep today, drowsing in the hot sun after its long fight against the river, catching its breath before resuming the routine of cutting fruit.

The only person Egan saw stirring was an old crone behind the yellow labor lines. She was cooking *tortillas* in a beehive shaped oven under a *manaca* canopy. Egan questioned her. The crone said she had seen a man, who might have been the professor, riding a mule toward the far sections of Blazco Farm, over toward the hills. He had been alone.

Egan phoned his report to the district superintendent.

"The poor damn fool's probably gone off to those Maya ruins he was asking me about," said Egan.

"Alone?"

"So far as I know he's alone."

Clark then spoke gravely:

"You shouldn't have let him do that. He's not familiar with the tropics. He'll probably lose himself in the jungle."

"That's too bad, Mr. Clark, but I didn't tell him to go. And it's not my fault he's a mollycoddle and can't take care of himself—"

"He's the company's guest, and you're responsible for him. I'd hate to have to report that you lost him. Better go after him."

"Aw now, Mr. Clark, I sure rate a little sleep don't I? I been busy with the river . . ."

"Better go right out after him, banana herder."

"All right, Mr. Clark."

Egan hung up. It was too much effort to argue. Grumbling to himself, he filled a big canteen with water, slipped a full flask into his hip pocket and made a package of greasy *fritos* which the cook had been frying for herself. He exchanged his mule for a swifter but less comfortable one. Then he slipped the toes of his boots, still incrusted with river mud, into the stirrups, and started out after Professor Zorick.

EGAN had been gone nearly two hours when the district superintendent discovered what was probably in store for the overseer and had a gastric chill at the thought that he was in a measure responsible. Clark had called Platanera to say that Professor Zorick's schedule had been retarded a day. The call reminded the division manager that in the excitement of the battle against the river he had overlooked the fact that he had not received the usual copy and confirmation of the professor's letters of introduction. He immediately called Tropical Radio at Puerto Justo and put through a routine query to the home office.

In less than an hour the answer came back from the States:

LETTERS PALPABLE FORGERIES PROFESSOR NICHOLAS ZORICK UNKNOWN THIS OFFICE HARTON UNIVERSITY HAS NO SUCH PERSON ON FACULTY

When Clark heard the reply, he had his motor rolled on to the tracks and hurried to Blazco Farm. Here he found Jessop, the earnest young timekeeper, already full of theories.

"Read this," said Jessop, handing Clark a crumpled sheet of the previous day's radio bulletin, which he had found wadded under a table on the veranda. He pointed to the following item:

> New York—Jeremy Freen, known as the Ph.D. killer, who shot his way out of Midwest Penitentiary two weeks ago, killing three guards, is believed to be in Central America. Police yesterday picked up his week-old trail in New York and found evidence indicating that he had sailed for some Caribbean port. Passenger lists are being scrutinized in an effort to learn his assumed identity.

"I suppose you think the professor is Freen?" asked Clark.

"Not much doubt about it," Jessop replied. "When he decided to jump the country, he forged those letters of introduction so that the fruit company would sort of help build up a new identity for him. Or he may have had some definite objective in coming to this part of the tropics; friends, maybe. When he saw by the radio bulletin that his presence in Central America was suspected, he pulled up stakes and left before we got wise to his real name."

"This another one of your theories?"

"It's not all theoretical," said Jessop. "When I saw that item in the press bulletin, I dug into the bundle of New York papers that came in with the last mail. Look."

The red headed timekeeper produced a newspaper and folded the bulky pages to an account of the escape of Jeremy Freen. There was a one-column cut of the "Ph.D. Killer" in convict garb. Jessop had penciled in a small mustache —an addition which, despite the felony number hung about the neck of the man in the prison photograph, gave him a close resemblance to Professor Nicholas Zorick.

Clark snatched the paper, anxiously

read the story of the man's escape and a recapitulation of his career. Jeremy Freen, according to the newspaper, had been a brilliant chemist with a queer kink in his brain which had shunted him into a life of ruthless, solitary crime. His unusual intelligence enabled him to get through a dozen robberies with three incidental murders before he was arrested the first time. Pleading homicidal mania, he was committed to an asylum for the criminal insane, escaped inside of three weeks, and was arrested the second time only after he had accomplished five more robberies and two murders. He was awaiting the result of an appeal on a death sentence when he made his last escape.

"Police declare Freen to be one of the most dangerous criminals at large," the account concluded. "His mild, disarming appearance, coupled with his education, the amoral quirk in his uncanny intelligence and his absolute disregard for human life, makes him a peril to any one who crosses his path, the police commissioner told reporters."

"My God!" exclaimed Clark. "I hope Egan doesn't find him."

"He will," said Jessop. "Egan will overtake him before dark certainly, and probably sometime early this afternoon."

"My God!" Clark repeated. "If he's as desperate as the paper says, he'll think Egan wants to bring him back because he's found out he's Jeremy Freen. He'll—of course he's armed."

"Sure," said Jessop. "He stocked up from the bungalow while we were all at the river last night. He helped himself to a pile of canned stuff from the pantry and took our guns. He took my .32 and he took Egan's automatic. Ammunition, too. I checked on that."

"You mean that Egan hasn't even got his own gun?"

Jessop shook his head.

"All Egan has is the machete hanging from his pommel."

Clark arose suddenly and slapped his ample thigh resoundingly with the folded newspaper.

"I'll have to go after him," he exclaimed.

"I thought you might let me—"

"I'll go," Clark repeated. "I sent Egan out on this. I— There goes your phone. Get on it."

When Jessop returned to the veranda his face was grim.

"They found Gladstone," he said. "He's been murdered."

"Your foreman? What happened? A drunken row?"

"Gladstone wasn't killed in a machete fight. He was shot."

"Shot? Your *mozos* pack guns nowadays?"

"No *mozo* killed Gladstone. According to my theory, Jeremy Freen wanted a rifle before he hit out for the *monte*. He tried to borrow Gladstone's. When Gladstone objected he killed him."

Clark jammed on his hat.

"Phone the *comandante*, will you?" he said, starting off the veranda. "Tell him I'll have a mule for him if he wants to start out with me to bring back a murderer." The screen door slammed behind him. He paused at the hibiscus hedge to fling back to the disappointed timekeeper, "Don't forget you've got fruit to cut. I want six hundred stems of English fruit from Blazco Farm tomorrow. The cars will be spotted this afternoon. If Egan's not back, start stowing in the morning."

JIM EGAN'S eyelids drooped as he rode through the steamy morning. He was too sleepy even to be annoyed at the thought that he would at this moment be enjoying well earned slumber had not a bald headed professor set out to get lost in the jungle. He opened his eyes and prodded his mule into a gallop. He was following the well grassed tramline that ran to the far edge of the farm, knowing that this would be his best opportunity to cut down the professor's lead. The jogging gait of the animal, moving through the green cloister of great banana leaves curving gracefully overhead, awoke him somewhat.

Beyond the last section of bananas he turned the mule into what had once been a trail cut by fruit company engineers making surveys for future banana cultivation. The land had never been cleared and the tropics had quickly reclaimed their own. The work of the engineers enabled a man to get through the jungle here without getting off his

mule too frequently; but the undergrowth, mule-high in some spots, was too rank to allow anything but a plodding advance.

Egan knew he was on the right track, for there were definite signs of the professor's passing—broken twigs, flattened grass, occasional hoof prints in the muddy banks of small streams. His own mule's caution kept Egan awake. He had to swear gently at the animal when it halted at some strange noise in the undergrowth, goad it when it balked on the margin of some uncertain muddy stretch, swear again when he had to dismount and help the mule flounder out of belly-deep mire.

The oppressive gloom of the jungle, fragrant with the warm smell of damp leaves and rotting vegetation, was not conducive to continued alertness, however. After awhile he no longer blinked at the white-hot shafts of sunlight that burned through the twilight of tangled branches and creepers. He was blind to the flash of a brilliant wing, deaf to the scream of birds and the chatter of monkeys. He slipped one foot out of its stirrup, eased himself to a seat on one haunch, let his chin touch his chest. Once he came to life to beat off a cloud of hungry gnats. Once he roused to find his mule stopped to browse on some *platanilla* leaves. He stayed awake this time to push out of the jungle into a prairie of tall, sharp bladed grass.

He had been this far before. He knew there was a swamp directly ahead. When he had gone another hundred yards he dismounted and examined the hoof prints his animal had been following. They turned to the east. That was the easiest trail, all right. It was the trail he had indicated to the professor when Zorick had asked about the way to the Maya ruins. But it was longer.

By turning to the west, Egan would avoid the long circumference of the swamp. He would have to go back into the jungle, but the engineers had blazed the way. They had even left a *manaca* shack or two they had built when making the survey. He would gain an hour on the professor by taking the western trail, and he was anxious to end his mission as soon as possible.

It had begun to rain.

He cut west, found the first *manaca* shack and made a brief halt to rest his mule. The dirt floor of the shack was thick with weeds and the thatched roof teemed with some low form of animal life. Egan waded through the weeds, used his hat to brush a family of scorpions off a wooden table, and stretched out for a moment. He had a drink, ate some cold *fritos*, and in twenty minutes he was moving again.

The trail began to climb. The rain had increased from a hot drizzle to a steamy downpour. The greasy *fritos* that Egan had eaten lay in his stomach like bricks—clinker bricks, judging from the multiplicity of sharp corners he seemed to feel. He tipped up his flask for a swallow of spiritus frumenti to aid digestion. The only noticeable effect was increasing drowsiness.

Within an hour he had come upon the westernmost reach of the swamp—a narrow neck that lost itself in the underbrush of a small ravine. Hundreds of tropical frogs were mingling bass and soprano in a strange chorus of praise to the rain. Across the tangle of reeds and water plants, Egan could see the ruins of another *manaca* shelter built by the engineers, perhaps three hundred yards away. He squinted. A beat of exultation thumped in his chest, nearly awakening him completely. From behind one corner of the *manaca* shack the rump of a mule protruded. He would not have to go any farther. The professor must be here.

Egan would even spare himself that last few hundred yards' ride. He could yell across at the professor to join him on his side. He cupped his hands, filled his lungs and let loose a blast of sound that echoed from the opposite slope.

"Hi, there, Prof. Zorick!" he shouted. "Will you come over here or shall I come and get you?"

THE rain was rattling on the leaves—not with the hollow, deafening roar it made on the bananas, but with a dull, drumming sound. Egan strained his ears to catch an answering hail. There was no response. He raised himself in his saddle, ready to repeat the shout, when he saw a tiny puff of gray smoke

spewed out from the shack. At the same time he heard a sibilant *zip* clipping leaves and branches to his left. A second later came the crashing report of a rifle.

"The damn fool don't recognize me," said Egan to himself. "He probably thinks I'm one of those outlaws from the ruins he heard about. I guess I ought to ride closer so he can see who I am."

He spurred his mule forward another fifty yards, stood up in his stirrups, waved his hat about his head and yelled again.

Another shot struck the ground in front of him, spattering up mud as it ricocheted, whining, into the jungle.

The back of Egan's neck slowly turned red. What was the matter with that bald headed duffer, to keep on shooting? Of course, he might be nearsighted. Or he might be scared to death about something. A musty old mollycoddle oughtn't to be allowed to play with guns. He was sure to hurt somebody.

"Quit that," bawled Egan, "or I'll come over and spank you!"

Another jet of mud spurted up in front of Egan. That was Gladstone's rifle; Egan recognized the way it was shooting. The gun carried low and to the right unless you made allowance for the sights being a little out of line.

Egan's mule reared, wheeled about, started back down the trail in panic. Egan reined in and nearly pulled the animal's head off before he could turn around again. He was half tempted to let the mule have its head and go back to the farm. He'd be lucky to get back by dark anyhow. The professor would probably die of fright if left alone to spend the night in the jungle; he was already panicky for some reason or other. No, as long as he had come this far, Egan would take care of the professor, even if he had gone crazy. The district superintendent said that Egan was responsible for his guest's getting lost; he would bring his guest back with him.

Egan dismounted and tied his mule to a tree. It was bad business, tying up a mule in the *monte* on account of the ants and other stinging insects that might crawl down the rope halter and drive the poor animal mad; but Egan did not expect to be gone long. Stooping to keep out of sight behind the tall growth, he ran along the trail. When he had reached a point twenty-five yards from the *manaca* shack, he took off his hat and raised himself slowly to make a cautious survey.

He could see the professor standing in the gloom of the shelter, rifle in hand. It was an easy shot for Egan—if he had had a gun. But even if he had had one, he couldn't shoot a man who was officially his guest, even if the guest had apparently gone crazy. And there was certainly something insane about the formerly mild Professor Nicholas Zorick. Even from a distance Egan could discern a glowering, distinctly unacademic expression on the man's face.

Suddenly an idea overtook Egan. The cogs of his brain ground slowly to a decision. He broke off a crooked branch, hooked his hat on it, and pushed it above the thicket some six feet in front of him.

Then he shouted—

"Drop that gun, Professor!"

A shot answered him.

Egan immediately abandoned cover and sprinted toward the shack. Gladstone's rifle was a single shot. It would take an expert a second or two to reload, and a professor probably couldn't reload at the shoulder—which would give Egan an extra few seconds.

Egan's mud clotted boots pounded their swift way toward the *manaca* shack. Egan was whooping like a banana cutter on the night after pay day.

The professor did not fumble long with the rifle as he saw Egan bearing down on him. The bald man dropped the rifle and whipped out a long blue automatic—Egan's own automatic.

At the sight of his own gun Egan pulled up short, a few paces from the professor. He raised his hands shoulder high. With a vicious grin the professor closed up the distance, shoved the muzzle of the gun into the pit of Egan's stomach. Instantly Egan's right hand flashed downward, pounced savagely on the professor's wrist, yanked the gun even farther into his stomach. The professor pulled the trigger . . .

CLARK, the district superintendent, had been riding anxiously through the jungle, riding as furiously as a mule can be ridden. Behind him rode a timekeeper who had won sharpshooter medals during several enlistments in the Marine Corps. The *comandante* and three native soldiers brought up the rear. Clark had picked up the ex-Marine because he wanted some one who could shoot better than just well. He was certain there would be shooting. He had no hope of capturing alive a criminal as desperate as Jeremy Freen was supposed to be. He had even less hope that he would overtake Jim Egan before Egan overtook Freen.

When Clark reached the edge of the swamp and found mule tracks leading off down each of the two trails, he dismounted and examined the hoof prints, trying to decide which ones to follow. Before he could make up his mind, he was startled to see two mules come plodding through the thicket toward him. On the lead mule rode a man, hog-tied, slung across the saddle like a sack of beans. On the second mule rode Jim Egan, a rifle on his back, a holster on each hip.

"Say, I hope you didn't get Platanera all excited about me losing my guest," drawled Egan, as he drew closer. "Because he ain't lost any more." Egan wore a decidedly sheepish expression as he saw Clark and his companions staring, speechless, at the roped figure on the first mule. "Say, I'm sorry I had to knock the professor out. I know it ain't exactly the way a fellow ought to treat his guest, but the prof kind of went crazy on us. Maybe he ain't used to the heat or something. He was shooting at me—"

"How the hell did you do it?" blurted Clark at last.

"Well, I kind of lost my temper," drawled Egan apologetically. "He poked my automatic into my stomach—my own automatic. I knew the damned thing wouldn't shoot when the barrel's pushed back like that. So I just grabbed his wrist and held the gun there so that the barrel would jam back against the recoil spring. No lock-breech automatic will shoot like that. Then I lost my temper and clipped him on the chin. It's a good thing a plant astrologist don't know anything about guns, or I surely couldn't have took a chance like that."

"He's no plant pathologist," said Clark when he recovered his breath. "He's an escaped murderer with nine killings on his record. The *comandante* here will take care of him for the ninth. He killed Gladstone for his rifle last night."

Egan swallowed but said nothing. Cold sweat sprang out in even lines across his forehead. He reached back for his flask and tipped it up for several long gurgles before he wiped his mouth on the back of his hand.

"If I'd known," he said, "I might have hit him harder. The idea of missing my sleep for a guy like that!"

Loot

By JAMES W. BENNETT

NO MAN in the world loves a joke as does a Chinese. Nowhere in the world will a joke travel so fast and so far. Just a year ago, the Sons of Han took time from their preoccupation with a dismal series of floods and famines to have a huge collective laugh.

The innocent cause of this cachinnation was the statue of Kuan Yin, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. There was nothing in the least humorous about the image. It had been carved from an exceptionally large tusk of ivory and its unknown craftsman had caught the

ineffable benignity, the suave beauty, of the Bodhissatva. Originally it had been in the possession of a Manchu empress.

Inside the hollowed walls of the statue was a jumble of Lilliputian objects, each made of gold or precious stones: a liver, a heart, lungs. When the empress was ill, she had taken the image from its shrine, gently shaken it, then written a plea for recovery on a square of yellow tribute silk. The silk was rolled tightly and placed inside the image, amid these highly stylized, minute bodily organs. But with the crumbling of the Manchu Dynasty, the last empress had given it to the Buddhist Temple of Kuan Yin in Jehol, once the Summer capital of Cathay.

Then, a year ago, a Chinese *tuchun* captured the ancient city of Jehol, a military gentleman known in China as the Great Traitor. The epithet was not undeserved!

The general saw the ivory Kuan Yin and promptly coveted it. He ordered a squad of his soldiers to raid the shrine and bring him the statue. The order was executed; but in the mêlée one of the temple priests was killed. Generously but anonymously, the *tuchun* sent the *bonze* of the shrine a bag of copper coins, totaling a hundred Yuan dollars. The *bonze*, being on the verge of active starvation, accepted this blood money.

Here—had the image been less famous—the matter might have rested. Protests, however, began to rise from all over China. The militarist had gone too far; he had deliberately committed sacrilege.

The central government, with which he had temporarily allied himself, was sharply memorialized. The general blandly issued a statement to the effect that he knew nothing of the statue. The next day, a Chinese newspaper in Tientsin countered by printing the names of the soldiers who had looted the temple. The *tuchun* pretended vast indignation. He summoned a drumhead court-martial, coolly shot down the entire squad and announced that henceforth this would be the fate of all looters in *his* army! The Kuan Yin, however, was not returned to its shrine in Jehol.

From that moment, the general's own particular fate seemed to turn away from him. His troops suffered defeat. His funds ran low and his unpaid army showed signs of wholesale desertion. He decided upon a bold move. Although Tientsin was in the hands of his enemies, he disguised himself in coolie clothes and penetrated to the Foreign Concession of that port. With a long, carefully wrapped bundle under his arm, he knocked at the gate of a certain Persian. The Persian was a connoisseur, a collector of Buddhist art treasures, being able to indulge in this expensive hobby because of a vast fortune originally made in opium. The militarist said quickly:

"This person has brought you the famous Manchu Kuan Yin. Its value has been appraised as half a million, gold. I shall sacrifice it for the ridiculously small sum of a hundred thousand gold."

"To the contrary," answered the Persian, "you will sell it to me for a hundred dollars, Mex."

The general gasped and goggled. The connoisseur went on:

"You have publicly stated that you know nothing of the fate of this statue. Would it not be embarrassing if China learned that all the time it was in your possession?"

"But a hundred Yuan dollars! Twenty dollars, gold! You're looting me!"

"Is not that the usual fate of loot?" asked the Persian, as he took from his billfold ten creased Bank of Tientsin notes.

Once again the matter might have ended, had not the Persian been possessed of a sense of humor, Chinese in its quality. He sent the Kuan Yin back to its smoky shrine in Jehol, at the same time succinctly relating the terms of the transaction.

And China burst into a mighty roar of laughter.

The MISTER

By WALT COBURN

THE stranger who had ridden up to the barn at the Jim Driscoll ranch sat his horse with just a hint of uneasiness stamped on his tanned face that needed shaving. The main reason for this uneasiness might have been the fact that two huge slate-colored dogs, as large as Great Danes or mastiffs, stood, one on either side of his horse, their eyes unfriendly, suspicious, the hair along the backs of their thick necks and shoulders erect. Whenever he moved in the saddle they growled.

The stranger on his gaunt-flanked, sweat-marked horse did not call out. He felt that he had been watched as he rode up, that eyes were even now sizing him up. Strangers, he had heard, were always under suspicion at Jim Driscoll's place—because it was claimed that Driscoll was too friendly with those hard eyed men who rode the outlaw trail. His place was said to be a way station where the initiated could get grub, a fresh horse and cartridges for his guns.

The stranger reached in his shirt pocket for tobacco and papers. The hounds growled. He grinned faintly and dropped his hands on his saddle-horn. The two big dogs sat back on their haunches.

Now from inside the big log barn there came a small boy of perhaps ten. He had a shock of curly yellow hair and his cheeks were red and tanned. His blue eyes looked at the stranger solemnly as he pulled the ears of one of the big hounds. He wore overalls and boots and an old hat.

"You Jim Driscoll's boy?"

"One of 'em." He took out a knife and started whittling.

"Is he around?"

"Jimmer's around somewheres. Takin' a nap, mebbe. He takes naps sometimes after he eats. He'll show up directly."

"How about callin' off them dogs, son?"

"Jimmer'll call 'em off."

The boy didn't return the man's friendly grin, but went on whittling a willow stick.

A man came from the main log house. He was a giant of a man, with a square-jawed, weather-beaten face, drooping gray mustache, and eyes set under heavy brows that were jet-black. He was pulling his suspenders over his shoulders, and at the waistband of his

trousers was the cedar butt of a .45. He came at a leisurely, unhurried gait, boot heels clumping on the hard packed path that led to the barn. A black hat was slanted across his eyes.

"You work for the Long X outfit?" asked the boy, before his father got close to the stranger.

"No. Why?"

"You're ridin' a Long X horse and he ain't vented," came the boy's reply.

Now Jim Driscoll came up. The big hounds relaxed their vigilance. Their tails wagged. The stranger found himself being looked over by the most searching pair of eyes he had ever seen. They were a mixture of black and gray. They seemed to read the rider's very thoughts.

"Are you Jim Driscoll?"

"That's me."

"I come up the trail from down in Utah. Stopped at Brown's Park and at the Lost Cabin."

He met the close scrutiny of Jim Driscoll's eyes without flinching.

"Light and put up your horse. Had dinner?"

"Yesterday." The cowpuncher grinned.

"Dobe," Jim Driscoll told the boy, "trot on to the house and tell your mother to rustle some grub."

When the boy had gone Jim Driscoll faced the short, bowlegged man who was unsaddling his weary horse.

"Whichaway, stranger?"

"Nowheres special. Driftin'. Figgered I might git a job bronc ridin' or punchin' cows around here."

"Who told you to stop here at my place?"

The question was put in a soft, unhurried drawl—the drawl of a Texan. Their eyes met.

"I was with the Kid and Ben and Butch down in Arizona for a spell. I was with Long Henry some. Camped with Dutch John on Wind River. And I fetched a letter from a red headed feller you know that's doin' a stretch at Leavenworth. A friend of his slipped it out and was fetchin' it. But he got in a ruckus in Denver and got shot up some. He give me the letter to fetch here."

He handed over a letter wrapped in heavy brown paper for protection.

Jim Driscoll opened the envelop slowly. It bore no name or address. The letter inside was so worded that it would mean nothing to any one who chanced to read it. Nor was it signed except by a peculiar little mark that might have been a stock brand. But to Jim Driscoll it told plenty. And only one man could have written it. That man, a notorious outlaw, was doing a short stretch under an assumed name. While law officers all over the United States were hunting for him, he was hidden in prison, his true identity lost.

The big rancher folded the letter and put it back in the soiled envelop. It was a message from behind the gray walls and steel bars of the prison that now held a cowboy who had gone wrong and turned to the outlaw trail. Jim had known him when he was a tophand and honest, even as he had known so many of those others who were now hounded by the law.

Those hunted men came and went. They stopped to change horses, to get a hot meal, to borrow a box of cartridges. Then they rode on. They knew better than to offer money to big Jim Driscoll. What he did for them, risking his own liberty, he did because they were his friends. And even those men whom he helped had never been able to figure out this soft spoken cowman who helped them. He was one of them, after a fashion—sharing many of their viewpoints, condemning other ideas they held.

A puzzle to all men, big Jim Driscoll. His word was as good as the governor's oath. Sheriffs liked and respected him. The big cow outfits in that section liked him and called him a square dealer. More than a few times he had sent back to some outfit horses that had turned up missing. They never asked questions. No information was ever volunteered.

Time and again secret service men and detectives tried to get something on him. They had never succeeded. What his real name might be, where he had come from, why he had left there, no man knew. Even his wife and three sons knew nothing of Jim Driscoll's past.

"Get the goods on Jim Driscoll," said the head of the biggest detective agency in the United States, "and we'll break up that outlaw gang. Driscoll is the brains, the real leader."

Old-time peace officers in Montana took a different stand. They had worked with Jim Driscoll on the round-up. They had stayed at his ranch many a time. To a man they would tell you that Jim Driscoll never had a dishonest dollar in his pocket.

JIM DRISCOLL waited until the stranger had put up his horse, the horse that wore the brand of a neighboring cow outfit. Jim's grin was friendly as he spoke now, though he had noted every detail of the man's appearance—his puckered gray eyes, the way he walked, how his right hand seemed instinctively to be always near the bone handled gun he carried in the waistband of his overalls that were saddle warped. The carbine in its scabbard. The double rigged saddle that had no stamping on it. The man's boots made by a Texas bootmaker, the silver mounted spurs, long-shanked. Montana style those days favored drop-shanked spurs. Center-fire and three-quarter rigged saddles were used. Double-rigged saddles belonged in the Southwest. Yet the man had no drawl in his voice. He talked like a Northerner. All these details Jim Driscoll mentally filed away. Also the fact that the man had a knife scar on his jaw and that he limped a little.

"That boy of yours is quick on brands," said the man, joining his host in the doorway of the big barn. "He spotted that Long X brand right off."

Jim Driscoll grinned and nodded.

"Dobe will make a cowhand some day. So will Harry, the oldest. Young Dave taken more to book learnin', though he sets a horse good. Dave's the middle 'un. They're off now with the Circle C roundup. Reppin' for me. They each got their own iron, too, and a few head o' cattle. Makes 'em take an interest, thataway."

The two big hounds followed at their heels as the men walked to the house.

There was a bench near the kitchen door. A wash basin, a bucket of clear spring water, a dipper, soap, and a clean roller towel. The woman who came to the door was dressed in clean gingham, and her curly yellow hair was neatly arranged. Her eyes were blue, her cheeks rosy. A strong, full bosomed woman. She smiled and nodded to him.

"Wash up, stranger," said Jim Driscoll.

"My name is Bill Meadows," said the man, rolling up his shirt sleeves. "I never thought to tell you. Not that it means much. Ain't much in a name. Names can be changed like a dirty shirt."

"And with a heap less bother," agreed Jim, and it seemed to the man who called himself Bill Meadows that the big rancher's voice had lost a little something of its cordiality. Or was he just imagining things?

So far, it seemed as if things had gone smoothly enough. That letter should have done the trick. Jim Driscoll could have no knowledge of how he had gotten that letter. How he had trailed the ex-convict who was to deliver it to Driscoll. He had caught up with his man in Denver. The man was a killer, dangerous as a rattler. Meadows had orders to take no chances with him. But his orders were to get that letter at any cost. So he had waited for the right chance. It came in a third rate gambling joint. A card game.

Meadows, dealing, had caught a glint of recognition in the eyes of the man who had the letter. A snarling curse. An overturned table. The roar of the two guns. Meadows had shot in self-defense. The thing had all the earmarks of just another drunken fight over cards. Then, in the confusion that followed, Meadows had gotten the letter from the dead man's pocket.

That letter was then steamed open and decoded by experts, sealed once more, and given to Bill Meadows to deliver to Jim Driscoll. Could Driscoll be suspecting him? Not likely. Yet a man never could be sure of anything in this game that Bill Meadows played.

It was a dangerous game, and for the most part Bill Meadows played a lone hand. The part he now played came to him easily. For the past year or more he had lived around the vari-

ous outlaw hangouts. He had even participated in holdups and cattle stealing and horse rustling. He would get drunk with the gang and shoot out the town lights and get thrown in jail. He had, in fact, become a member of that hunted fraternity that rides the dim, crooked trails.

If ever the duplicity of his rôle made any mark on his conscience, he never had shown it, because the man who went under the name of Bill Meadows was a born man-hunter. And he was after big game now. The men he wanted to trap were as deadly as rattlesnake poison. They were the hardest riding, fastest shooting, most daring bunch that rode the trail between Mexico and Canada. One little mistake, one unguarded sentence, and it meant death. It took courage to do what Bill Meadows was now doing.

He washed his hands and face in the soapy water, emptied the water in a blind swing that sprayed some bushes along the creek and, soap still in his eyes, filled the basin with clear water to rinse off the suds. He dried himself on the spotless roller towel and hitched up his overalls.

"Little drink before you set down, Meadows?"

"I don't mind, Driscoll."

Inside the front room of the log house, Jim brought out a jug and two glasses. Dobe stood near the door leading into the dining room, his blue eyes watching the stranger. The big hounds lay outside the screen door. The men drank together, then Meadows was shown to the dining room.

A red and white tablecloth. An ornate thing in the center of the table that held large containers of salt, pepper, vinegar and pepper sauce. There was roast beef and potatoes and fresh vegetables. Pie and cake and doughnuts. Strong coffee and thick cream. Store butter. Fresh bread.

Jim Driscoll went out to the barn. Little Dobe stood there, still looking at the stranger unsmilingly. Somehow the boy's staring made him feel uncomfortable. But he was hungry and the food was excellent. Driscoll's wife worked in the kitchen, humming as she puttered around with her pots and pans. She came in to ask if the stranger wanted more coffee.

"The Mister never drinks coffee." She smiled.

She called her husband the Mister, only she pronounced it "mistah."

Time had been when she must have been an unusually good looking girl, with her straight features, her eyes the color of sapphire, her unruly mop of curly, golden hair. She had borne her husband three sons. And during the eighteen years they had been married her life had not been an easy one. The life of a rancher's wife is never easy. And being married to big Jim Driscoll had its added burdens. Men came and went at all hours of the day and night. She never asked who they were. Jim never told her. Some of them she knew.

But whenever those men came she was always willing to get up and cook them a hot meal. Hot meals along the outlaw trail were mighty few, because the smoke of a camp-fire shows. And for obvious reasons Jim Driscoll wanted no outsider doing the cooking. You never could trust outsiders. When there were men at the ranch putting up hay or working with the cattle and horses, a squaw from the nearby Fort Belknap Reservation was hired. Indians aren't talkers.

BILL MEADOWS took three cups of coffee, and he was profuse in his praise of the dinner. Meadows knew that it never did any harm to praise a woman's cooking. And more than once he had picked up bits of information from different kinds of women, information that led to the arrest and conviction of the men he was trailing. He complimented her on the rice pudding.

"Ever eat a son-of-a-gun-in-the-sack?" asked Dobe from the doorway.

The delicacy named is a suet pudding stuffed with raisins and bits of citron, steamed in a flour sack. It is the cowboy's favorite pudding.

Bill Meadows nodded. Dobe frowned a little.

"Ever eat a son-of-a-gun at the Circle C roundup?"

"Never have."

"If you ever did," came the rather

patronizing, unsmiling reply, "you wouldn't be talkin' thataway about a ol' rice puddin'."

Bill Meadows grinned. The boy's mother smiled faintly, patiently, a little absently. Her three sons—the oldest sixteen, the youngest ten—sometimes puzzled her. In some ways they were grown men at Dobe's age. They talked about brands and broncs and cattle and guns. Jim gave them everything they asked in the way of cowboy stuff. He let them have their heads. They smoked and cussed and hung around the cowpunchers. They rode good horses, and the two older boys packed guns.

Dobe packed a big old six-shooter from which the trigger spring had been removed. He had it shoved in the waistband of his overalls. In spite of his mop of yellow curls and his sapphire-blue eyes there was a hardness to the little chap. Perhaps it was the squareness of his jaw, the tightness of the lips that seldom smiled. They were their father's sons and were backward about showing any outward sign of love for their mother. Undemonstrative, those boys sired by big Jim Driscoll, and they considered such display of affection effeminate.

Bill Meadows started to go outside for a smoke. The two big slate-colored hounds got to their feet. Their eyes warned the man back in the house. He closed the screen door and sat down in a rocker. Dobe still stood over by the doorway that led into the dining room. The silence was not exactly comfortable. He wished that Jim Driscoll would show up. He made one or two attempts at conversation, but Dobe was not at all responsive. The mother was in the kitchen, humming as she worked.

"Ain't you kinda young to be packin' a gun, son?" he asked once.

"That's what that he-schoolmarm said. He sent me 'n' Dave 'n' Harry home. He told us to not come back till we shed them guns. He wouldn't fight Harry when Harry cussed him out. But Jimmer taken it up with the school board. Jimmer's one o' the board. He told 'em us kids was goin' to school and that we'd pack our guns, too. But we had to leave 'em in the cloakroom. Jimmer pays taxes and that 'titles us kids to go to school."

Dobe sat down on the floor, squatting on the heels of his boots. He had pulled a whangleather string from his pocket and was tying and untying knots in it.

An old fashioned clock ticked loudly. There were home-made rag rugs on the pine board floor that was scrubbed almost white. The rocking chair creaked a little. Flies buzzed outside. There were wild roses in a bowl.

Now, from outside, the thud of shot hoofs. Dobe went to the screen door. His red cheeked face broke into a wide smile.

Bill Meadows saw a girl riding a big roan horse. She was dark eyed, handsome, with tanned skin and black hair. She wore a man's hat, a flannel shirt and a divided skirt made of glove leather. Her small feet were inside beautifully made high heeled boots of dark tan leather. Her teeth showed white as she called out to Dobe. The two big dogs came to her, tails wagging, and she played with them, her buckskin-gloved hands pulling their ears. She was small, quick moving, athletic.

"Hello, Dobe, old sheep thief!" Her silver mounted spurs jingled. Her voice was soft, pleasant. "Anybody home?"

"There's a stranger in the house. Maw's in the kitchen." Dobe had met her outside. "Did you fetch that quirt, Kate?"

"It's hangin' on my saddlehorn."

Her red mouth still smiled, but Bill Meadows saw her dark eyes narrow a little. He reckoned this was Kate Moran, daughter of old Hank Moran, the saloon man and mine owner in the Little Rockies. Kate Moran, reputed sweetheart of Harry Carver, better known as the Cow Island Kid. The Cow Island Kid, horsethief, gambler and bronc rider of notorious repute. It was suspected that the Kid sometimes rode the outlaw trail, but he had never been caught.

Now Driscoll's wife, wiping her work reddened hands on her apron, came in, just as Kate Moran entered the front door into the big sitting room, or parlor. The girl's eyes looked hard at Meadows, who got to his feet. Dobe had started for the barn, leading the girl's big roan.

Bill Meadows wished now that he

had shaved last night when he camped. He bowed stiffly with a scraping of his right foot. The girl smiled.

"Land sakes, Kate, I wasn't expectin' you, or I'd have baked a fresh cake. This is Mr. Meadows. Meet Miss Moran, Mr. Meadows."

"I promised Dobe I'd bring him a horsehair quirt that a boy sent me from Deer Lodge. Ever make any horsehair quirts, Mr. Meadows?"

Now horsehair quirts are made in the State Prison at Deer Lodge, Montana. The question, he guessed, was in the way of a deeper interrogation.

"That," he countered, "might be sayin'."

She laughed, her black eyes watching him, then she turned to Jim Driscoll's wife.

"There's a big dance in town tomorrow night, Aunt Julia. Five of the roundup outfits are pullin' in close. They're workin' together for a few weeks. You'll come?"

"If the Mister can get away, Kate."

"Never knew Jimmer to miss a dance if there was a chance of gettin' there, even through blizzards and high water. Here he is now. . . Jimmer, we're makin' a dance uptown. You and Aunt Julia have to be there. We have plenty of fiddlers in case one or two take on too much tanglefoot. A piano player from the honkytonk. Cowboys from five outfits that are camped at the foot of the mountains. It won't be a dance without you and Aunt Julia."

Big Jim Driscoll smiled and pulled at his drooping mustache. His eyes were softened now.

"You can count on us, Kate. The missus has been frettin' because she ain't had a chance to bake up cakes and doughnuts. And that buggy team o' mine needs exercise."

"You'll come, Mr. Meadows?" Kate then asked, looking at him.

"I'd be plumb glad to." He met the bold challenge of her black eyes with a smile.

"Meadows," said Jim Driscoll, in his soft, drawling voice, "is a plumb stranger. I hired him to gentle a few broncs. I'll see he gits to the dance."

He turned to the detective.

"I'll show you them broncs. We got time to ride down in the lower pasture."

JIM DRISCOLL staked Meadows to a fresh horse, and they rode down the brush flanked creek. They looked over the horses there in the lower pasture. Then Driscoll led the way back by a circuitous route, pointing out brands on the cattle, talking, yet saying little. They stopped at a neighboring ranch and spent an hour or so with a white bearded old man there who had a jug and a fund of anecdotes. It was two hours past dark when they got back to the ranch. Kate Moran had gone. Mrs. Driscoll was puttering around in the kitchen, humming. The men washed up and went into the sitting room for a little nip.

Bill Meadows noticed the odor of tobacco smoke in the room. In a box filled with damp sawdust were half a dozen stubs of hand rolled, brown paper cigarets.

Had Kate Moran come here to meet some man? Had that man been the Cow Island Kid? Had Jim Driscoll somehow slipped that code letter to Kate Moran? The letter that asked Jim Driscoll to get some person designated as K to lift a cache of money that had come from a big train robbery in Wyoming. Had they out-foxed him? Had this unknown K, who might be Kate Moran, located the money and lifted it while Driscoll was showing him around and getting him home two hours after dark? Had Kate Moran seen Driscoll and talked with him before she showed up at the house with her horsehair quirt for Dobe and the news of the dance tomorrow night? This K was to get the money and give it to Driscoll. Was that money here in the house or hidden somewhere on the ranch? Did they suspect him of being a detective? Was it the Cow Island Kid who had left those cigaret butts behind?

Bill Meadows ate his supper without tasting the food. The whisky he had taken at that white bearded neighbor's had made his head dizzy; his thoughts were muddled.

Dobe sat over in a corner of the room poring over a saddle catalogue and a brand book. Meadows yawned, and

Jim Driscoll suggested bed. He led the detective to the deserted bunkhouse. There were two or three tarp covered beds on the bunks.

"You got 'er all to yourse'f, Meadows. The boys is all gone off on the round-up."

He left the lantern he had used to guide them along the path.

Bill Meadows took off his boots and overalls and turned out the lamp. His sixshooter was under his pillow. He still felt the effects of the whisky and he was tired. But he fought off sleep. He wanted to take a look around after they had gone to bed. After what seemed hours the light in the house went out. Another interminable wait. Then he removed the spurs from his boots and tiptoed to the door. A board creaked under his weight. The knob of the door made a noise and the hinges of the bunkhouse door seemed to shriek. And from out there in the darkness came the ominous growling of the two huge hounds that looked bigger than ever in the faint light of a half moon. Swearing under his breath, the detective closed the door and went back to his bunk.

THE squeak of fiddles. The droning of an accordion. The calling of the square dances and the Virginia Reel. "Turkey In The Straw" and "Hell Among The Yearlin's." "Chicken Charlie" and the "Red River Jig." Laughter. Shouts. Squeals as some cowboy swung a girl off her feet.

"Do-si-do!"

"That Meadows feller dancin' with Kate Moran again. Three times now, hand runnin'. There'd be trouble a-plenty if the Cow Island Kid showed up."

"Who is this here Medders?"

"Friend o' Jimmer's, somebody said. Kate shore taken to him. Never seen her git thataway before. 'Tain't healthful fer Meadows, if some friend o' the Kid's taken 'er up."

"That ain't our lookout. None of our sorrow, cowboy."

The dance was upstairs in the lodge hall. In the cloakroom stood a dozen cowboys, smoking, watching the dancing. Among them was Jim Driscoll. He talked and joshed in his drawling, unhurried manner, with the others. Under his coat bulged the butt of his old cedar-handled sixshooter.

Outside was a square platform about twelve feet wide, with rather steep plank steps and a rail, down the side of the building—a twenty-foot drop from the platform. Below, there in the darkness, rigs of all kinds. Horses eating hay. Saddled horses at the hitch-rack. Riders coming and going between the lodge hall and the dusty street several hundred yards up the gulch where the whisky flowed and the poker chips clicked.

There cowboys swaggered, spur rowels dragging. Singing, swearing, laughing, fighting. Cowboys in town. Tobacco smoke and the slopped liquor on the bar. At the card tables men whose tanned faces were masks, whose eyes watched the hands of the tin-horn dealer. Arguments about horses and cattle. Whisky confidences that might lead to regrets and future enmities. A goodly sprinkling of hard rock miners who fought with iron fists, but stayed apart from the gun-toting cowboys. Tin-horn gamblers with pasty faces and deft fingers, their eyes blank, shuffling, dealing, fingering stacks of chips. Making change, raking in jackpots now and then, and taking out the house percentage from every pot. A few bleary eyed barroom bums, scum of the lot, begging drinks, fawning on cowboy and miner, taking insults with a meaningless, vacant grin, returning to drain a forgotten glass left by a cowboy.

A red faced, heavy paunched man behind the bar. Time had been when he was rated the best wagon boss in the country—till whisky and a dance hall woman lured him away from the open range and into town. Some night he would die of the drunken horrors or whisky heart. But until that day came he would serve his customers and drink his quart or two quarts of whisky every day, swapping stories with those spending, letting the barflies ride in on drinks bought by the open handed cowboys, keeping an eye out for trouble that required a bung starter to restore quiet. Cowboys in town!

Now a tall, lithe cowpuncher came in through the swinging doors. He walked up to the bar. The saloon man wiped his right hand on a soiled apron and grinned a welcome.

"Long time no see you, Harry!"

Like an electric shock the whisper went through the saloon. Harry Carver was in town. The Cow Island Kid had come back from somewhere!

"Give the boys what they want. Belly up to the bar, you sons!"

OVER at the lodge hall the dance was in full swing. Between dances the youngsters romped around on the floor. Long benches lined two walls, and there the women sat, flushed with excitement, trading gossip of ranch and town. Here and there a man, with a burning thirst for red-eye and a stern-eyed wife, sat uncomfortably amid this feminine coterie, his eyes fixed on the group of men in the cloakroom.

Near the musicians' platform Bill Meadows sat talking and flirting with the black haired, dark eyed Kate Moran. He was shaved, and wore a new suit and a tie. His boots were shined. Not a bad looking man, and the eyes of many a girl strayed his way. But he had time for no one but Kate Moran. And it looked as if Kate was not at all displeased by this flattering attention.

To Bill Meadows, detective, it seemed that he was getting along in fine style. By flattery and cleverly put questions he was drawing out this supposed sweetheart of the Cow Island Kid, outlaw. She talked freely about different men who rode the outlaw trail. She knew them, had danced with them. Bill Meadows, who flattered himself that he had a way with the women, was more than a little proud of his rapid progress. He was holding her hand; and, when they danced a waltz, he held her closely and she promised things with her dark eyes. The other girls tilted their noses in envy, and some of the older women scowled their disapproval at the brazen flirtation of wild Kate Moran who ran with such outlaws as the Cow Island Kid. They whispered among themselves, branding this stranger as one of the outlaws who came and went at Jim Driscoll's place. And the men watched, jealous of this stranger who danced better than they did and who now was monopolizing Kate Moran, who was the best looking girl and the best dancer there.

"Be to that jasper's sorrow if the Cow Island Kid showed up. He shore is jealous o' Kate."

And now the whispered rumor swept the place like a prairie fire.

"The Cow Island Kid's in town. Over at the First And Last Chance right now."

Apparently Kate and Bill Meadows were the only two in the dance hall who were ignorant of the news. They sat in their corner, holding hands, whispering, laughing.

Since a shooting scrape a few months before, the men were forbidden to pack guns in the dance hall. There was a sign in the coat room to that effect: "Leave your guns with the ticket man at the door."

A deputy sheriff was there to see that the order was obeyed. He collected the guns and put them in a big box that had a lid and padlock. No guns were returned until the owner was ready to leave the dance.

Now, at the hint of trouble, a few of them had gotten their hats and guns and were down below at the foot of the outside stairway, talking and waiting for whatever might happen when the Kid came to the dance. Because, while there was no warrant for the Cow Island Kid, he was out under a peace bond, and another on a horse stealing charge. The sheriff would nab him, or try to nab him, at the first sign of gunplay. But it took a hard man to handle the tall, fast fighting Kid. And he would shoot if he were crowded. The sheriff had deputized three or four men to help him in case of trouble. One of these men now guarded the locked box that held the guns.

Bill Meadows had checked a six-shooter. But under his coat and hidden beneath his new flannel shirt was a .45 automatic in an armpit holster.

Harry Driscoll, the oldest of the three boys, spoke to his father.

"The Kid's over town, Jimmer. Somebody better tell that feller to turn his

rope loose from Kate."

Jim Driscoll nodded indifferently.

"I been expectin' the Kid. Go on and git this dance afore all the girls is picked out."

Harry Driscoll, named after a notorious member of the Wild Bunch, was as tall as his father. Slim, quick and dark. He scowled at Meadows as he watched him waltz past with Kate. Kate, seeing his scowling face, shook her head at him and wrinkled her tanned nose. Usually she danced with Harry Driscoll, but not tonight. She used to say that when her own Harry, meaning Harry Carver, was away, she looked to young Harry Driscoll to take care of her. And because young Harry liked her as if she were an older sister, and because he liked the Cow Island Kid, he was now in a black mood.

"Hold on, son." Jim Driscoll slapped Harry's right flank. "Either give over that gun or go back uptown. And just keep out o' whatever might come up."

Not often did big Jim Driscoll give his boys an order. He wanted them to learn to do their own thinking. Young Harry turned, looked squarely into his father's eyes for a long moment, then nodded.

"All right, Jimmer."

He went outside and down the steps, his hat pulled down across his eyes which were smoldering dark lights.

Big Jim stood there in the doorway, his black hat slanted on his thick gray hair. As Kate danced past in the arms of Bill Meadows she gave Jim a brief nod and a wink. The lines about the big rancher's mouth tightened a little.

When the waltz ended he beckoned to Dobe, who, with some other small boys, were hanging around the long table where sandwiches and cold meats and pickles and doughnuts and cake and fried chicken and grouse and prairie chicken, covered by red and white patterned table cloths, were being guarded by two rather worried looking women.

Dobe came reluctantly. He and his young fellow-conspirators had just figured out how they could get at the guarded food. They had been waiting for the proper moment to launch their strategic attack.

"What's wigglin' around inside your shirt, Dobe?"

"A bull snake, that's all, Jimmer."

It was characteristic of big Jim that he asked no further questions concerning the hidden snake. He looked at the group of small boys, who watched Dobe anxiously. He did not miss the harassed look on the faces of the two maiden ladies who guarded the supper. A bull snake is harmless, but not exactly a contributing factor to the peace of mind of two rather nervous women should they suddenly become aware of the fact that a three-foot one is wriggling under their feet. Their vigilance would undoubtedly, at least, be temporarily distracted and the result upon the activities of several small, hungry boys could be easily figured out. Big Jim smiled and pulled at his mustache.

"You'll find Harry down below somewheres. Tell him I said to lope over to the saloon and tell the Cow Island Kid I said he better git outa town."

Dobe nodded. He called to the other youngsters that he'd be back in a minute.

THE sheriff came over to Jim, a worried look in his eyes.

"They tell me the Kid's in town, Jim. If he shows up here, aimin' to start a fight, he'll git more'n he's dickered for. You better git word to him. And that Meadows gent is shore huntin' trouble, looks to me, the way he's buildin' to Kate Moran. Who is he, Jimmer?"

"Name's Meadows, so he told me. He wanted a job ridin' broncs. I hired 'im. Anything more you want to know about him, go ask him. I ain't his keeper, ner I ain't Harry Carver's keeper. They're both free, white, and past twenty-one and able to handle their own business."

Jim Driscoll grinned slowly. The sheriff, a new man in office, frowned. About half the younger cowpunchers, the more reckless ones, had gotten their guns and hats and were either on the outside platform or down below where bottles were being passed around. Some of the miners were quite tipsy.

"I don't want trouble here, Jim," the sheriff said. "I might deputize you to kinda lend a hand."

"I reckon not. You ain't deputizin' me."

Dobe was back with his friends. There was a Virginia Reel in full swing. The terrified screeching of the two guardians of the food paralyzed fiddlers and dancers. There, in that place that was already charged with suspense, it came as a shock. Men hurried their women to the side walls, their faces tense. Confusion! The sheriff's gun was in his hand as he leaped out of the doorway and stood, his back to the wall. The two maiden ladies were standing on their chairs, screaming shrilly. A number of small boys dodged through the crowd, laden with food. Dobe, as he slipped past his father, was stuffing the pet bullsnake back in under his shirt. Big Jim Driscoll grinned, though his eyes, narrowed slightly, watched Kate Moran and Bill Meadows.

Meadows, his face a shade white, stood in front of Kate, his right hand shoved inside his shirt, his body a little crouched.

Now, behind big Jim, the rattle of spurs. He whirled halfway around and the gun in his hand was poked into the ribs of the Cow Island Kid.

"Git down them steps, Kid," he said quietly, "and drag it. I sent Harry to tell you to hightail it."

"I ain't seen Harry. But I got word that this Bill Meadows is a dancin' man. I come to fetch him over town where he'll git the chance to dance to some sixshooter music."

The sheriff and his deputies came crowding up, guns drawn. Big Jim Driscoll faced them, his eyes glittering. Men said of Jim Driscoll that he never needed to pack a gun, that his eyes could make any man put up his shooting iron.

"I'm handlin' this," he said, his voice unhurried, drawling. "Put them guns up or you'll start hell a-poppin'!" He turned back to the white lipped Cow Island Kid who had taken a drink or two too many.

"Drag it, Kid. I'll handle Bill Meadows. Are you takin' them orders er do I have to bend this gun acrost your skull?"

"No dancin' man kin take my girl!" The Kid's voice was a husky, snarling whisper. "Let me git to him, Jim. You got no right to stop me. Let me in there or I'll—"

His voice was a hoarse, snarling growl now. Women cowered behind the men along the walls. With a leap, swift as a panther, the Cow Island Kid smashed Jim's gun from his hand and was inside the dance hall, his gun in his hand. His yellowish eyes blinked, for he had come from the darkness into the light. He was trying to spot Kate and Meadows.

A terrible hush held the place in its grip. Big Jim Driscoll wrenched the gun from the sheriff's hand just as that bewildered law officer was about to take a shot at the Kid. The gun in big Jim's hand now thudded against the Kid's head. The Kid dropped like a shot beef. And even before he hit the floor, big Jim Driscoll was walking unhurriedly across the floor to where Bill Meadows stood, his face white, his eyes glittering, his hand inside his shirt. But he no longer crouched, ready to shoot. He stood erect, straight backed, desperation, bewilderment, perhaps a little fear stamped on his tense face. His hand came away from his hidden gun.

The sheriff had picked up the Kid's gun where it lay on the floor. He then started for Jim Driscoll, who was walking slowly toward Meadows. Now Harry Driscoll intercepted the sheriff.

"Better let Jimmer handle this his own way, Sheriff. We're all in a tight, and Jimmer's the only man that kin git us out without plenty o' shootin'." Young Harry's voice was low pitched, calm, like the voice of his father.

To Bill Meadows, detective, those split seconds must have seemed hours. In his ears hissed the whispered words of Kate Moran who had danced with him and promised so much with her eyes. Kate Moran who had stepped behind him when the two old maids screeched. Kate, who had talked to him of the outlaws whom she knew so well. Something hard, like the muzzle of a gun, pressed Meadows between the shoulderblades. Kate's voice, no longer soft, musical, promising, but harsh and metallic:

"Pull that gun, Meadows, and I'll bust your spine with a bullet. I spot-

ted you from the start. Tonight when I fixed your tie I felt the badge pinned to your shirt. There's a gun under your armpit, but if you pull it you'll die in your tracks! Savvy that, mister detective?"

"I git you, ma'am."

Meadows saw the Kid lying on the floor, his body twitching as he regained consciousness. He saw big Jim Driscoll, with a drawn gun, walking slowly toward him. Kate whispered another warning. Yet he kept his courage. He forced a thin smile as he faced Jimmer and the drawn gun. He saw the sheriff and deputies badly outnumbered by the men who now shoved their way into the dance hall. It looked like death. News had spread that this Meadows was a detective. There were ugly, menacing growls. A rope appeared. The crowd, now headed by the still groggy Cow Island Kid, was coming.

Some one had slipped a gun into the Kid's hand. Weaving a little on widespread legs, his bloodshot eyes glared at Meadows.

"Kate," said Jim Driscoll quietly, "git over there with the other women, where you belong. Git! You heard me!"

Bill Meadows relaxed a little as that small, hard object was taken away from his back. Kate shrugged her shoulders and laughed softly, joining the other women.

Big Jim Driscoll smiled faintly as Kate Moran put on the slipper, the heel of which she had been poking in the detective's back. Now the big cowman stood alongside Bill Meadows. Harry Driscoll was edging along the side of the hall to take his stand with his father. Dave was right behind his older brother. His mother's strong hands were all that kept Dobe from being with them.

"Pull your gun, Meadows," said Jimmer quietly. "But no shootin' unless I give the word."

Jimmer called out to the Cow Island Kid—

"Don't come no farther, Kid, er I'll have to kill you."

"What's the idee in protectin' a sneakin' dick? You turned quitter?"

"Take that back!" Harry Driscoll, white around the mouth, cocked his gun.

"No man, not even you, can say that about Jimmer!"

"Easy, son," said Jimmer, but keeping his eye on the Kid. "Meadows is a law officer, Kid. You ain't killin' him. No man here is a-goin' to harm him while he's with me. Kid, put up that gun and quit town. You're playin' outa turn. Git! Take your friends along! When you're sober, ride down to the ranch and we'll talk. Come any farther and I'll have to kill you. You none of you ever heard me lie. Haul your freight, Kid. Them as wants to stay at the dance, hand over their guns to the sheriff."

For a long, tense minute the Cow Island Kid glared hard at big Jimmer. Then he shoved his gun in its holster and walked slowly out the door and down the outside stairway. Some of the others followed him. Some handed their guns to the sheriff. The musicians started up their next dance tune.

"Harry," said Jimmer, "looks like you better dance with Kate. Dave, git Bill Meadow's horse and have it hid in the brush, below the hall. Come on, Meadows, time we was goin'."

Outside, there in the shadows of the night, Jimmer faced the silent Meadows.

"Well, Meadows, that was a close 'un. closer than you figgered. The Cow Island Kid is plumb jealous o' Kate They're married. You was playin' a losin' game from the start, but I hadn't figgered on the Kid gittin' drunk thataway and huntin' a shootin' scrape. Better not hang around here. No lone man is goin' to clean up here. And I might not be able to do you much good next time."

"You saved my life, Jimmer. I won't forget what you done. I was a goner. You're a white man. I'm pullin' out. I know when I'm licked. Before I go, I'd be proud to shake hands with you."

They shook hands, and Bill Meadows rode away into the night. Jimmer climbed the steps and hung his black hat in the coatroom. He grinned as he heard the voice of his wife:

"Dobe, come away from that lemonade and pickles. You better go locate the Mister before everythin's gone. You know how the Mister likes fried chicken and ice cream."

Beginning

SCALAWAG

By GORDON YOUNG

CHAPTER I

BILL JONES GOES ASHORE

CAPTAIN BILL JONES, blackbirder, pearler, trader, scalawag and all around scamp of the sea, rested a brawny shoulder against the *Merry Maid's* deckhouse. He pulled a shabby piece of old straw hat low over his face and eyed his companion with an expression that mingled liking for the young man with distaste for the advice the young man was giving.

"Don't do it, Bill. The whisky's bad and the folks you ought to lick so numerous you'll be sticking ashore three days. Then when you get back it'll take another three days for you to sober up so you won't be kicking the mainmast, and banging your toes, under the impression that you are booting the cook for using salt water in the coffee."

"Hmm," said Captain Bill, meditatively rubbing his hard fingers against the coarse brush of bristles on his chin. "I'm goin' over an' see ol' Woo Lung. That short tailed monkey owes me fifty dollars. An' he ain't a big enough liar to deny it."

"He won't trade you that girl for fifty dollars—that he doesn't intend to pay."

"Then I'll have me fifty dollars' worth of his yeller hide."

"Is she really pretty, Bill?"

"All women are pretty, son. Don't you know that? If not in the daytime, why then in the moonlight—when you can't see 'em very close."

"When did you see her? Daytime, or moonlight?"

"Neither. All I know is that Samoan Charley thinks she is the moon maiden, the tall fern of the hidden pool, the slimmest palm—you've heard 'im singin'. He allus sings loudest just when I'm gettin' off to sleep."

"Yes, but I don't know Samoan."

"It's sure an easy language to make love in," said Captain Bill reminiscently. "An' if Charley wants the girl, it's my duty as captain of the *Merry Maid* to see he gets 'er. I owe 'im a whole big keg o' dollars. Onct upon a time, not so long ago I've forgot it, I scraped the ol' money box clean dry to pay off my boys there at Sydney. Charley took his three months' wages over to the racetrack an' tied 'em to the tail of a shortender. That horse flashed down the

homestretch so fast its own shadder was a couple o' lengths behind. Charley knew I needed money. I allus need money.

"Well, if we don't have some good luck, unexpected, Charley most likely won't ever see that money again. But he's goin' to have the wife he wants if I have to tie my anchors ashore an' pull the old island out to sea where I can break 'er up an' save the chunk o' dirt that little chink girl's on. When my boys get in love, I help 'em. You'd better try it. Find some ol' planter's daughter—so I'll have a place to snug down in my old age."

"Whenever I have a roof over my head, Bill, whether it's marble or just coconut thatch, you've got a home."

"That's fine," said the brawny Bill, ruffling the boy's hair with a ponderous palm. "But as long as God keeps clouds in the sky an' water in the ocean I'll be at home."

Captain Bill had picked young Lawton up off the beach some months before, a sick and penniless boy; and had brought him off to the *Merry Maid*, tucked him into a bunk and had seen to it that he had plenty of chicken soup and French wine to drink.

Captain Bill Jones was, in certain well hidden spots of his heart, as tender as he was tough and rough outwardly. He was hard bitten, but good natured, generous, tricky, a nasty one in a row and hasty about getting into one.

It was easy for certain shrewd persons to have the better of him, for he was pretty haphazard in business matters. But the shrewd persons usually wished that they had let him alone. Captain Bill had his own notions about how to square accounts. A lot of people distrusted Bill Jones, but not if they had sailed with him, or had themselves been strictly honest in their dealings with him.

"Now I can coax Woo Lung all right." Captain Bill slowly opened and closed a big hand. "But he keeps that girl out o' sight. Says she's in love with a Dutchman. I'll bet my head 'gainst a coconut that *he's* in love with the Dutchman—the Dutchman's dollars. No nice little halfbreed chink girl would rather fry sausages—not in this climate—for a Dutchman than listen to Charley's love songs. Charley's a white man—if he is badly sunburnt."

Captain Bill straightened, tipped up the straw brim, vaguely waved a big hand.

"Likely as not, you've noticed, Lawton, a lot o' people don't like me. I worry myself sick, just wonderin' why. I'm han'some. I'm p'lite. I never steal nothin' if I think I'm goin' to get caught. I'm sociable. Like the Scotchman I heard of, I can drink any given amount—but I prefer stuff that burns on the way down an' explodes when it hits my belly. So far, I've never run off with no man's wife—though a lot of 'em have begged me to do it."

"Wives?"

"No, their husbands. An' now I've got duties to perform." Captain Bill gazed shoreward. "Tomorrow when we pull the ol' hook out of this Teehoolaloo mud—" thus Bill distorted the beauteous name of Tehuala Island—"we're goin' far away to be gone forevermore—'r so I hope. Providin' my farewell ceremonies are of such a nature that all an' sundry, an' all the sun dried Dutchmen, halfbreed chinks an' pious niggers, together with other thieves, won't forget they never want to see me again.

"Lawton, I don't mind dealin' with honest cannibals who'll steal the ringbolts out of your deck under your nose, an' cut off your head if your back is turned. I don't mind dealin' with white pirates an' runaway convicts. Then ever'thing's square an' above-board. You know you can't believe anything they say, so you don't get confused. But here at Teehoolaloo the missionaries have brought in too much civilization for simple sailormen like me."

"I hear a couple of new missionaries landed here a few days ago, Bill."

"By this time tomorrow they'll be thankin' me then for havin' give 'em such a fine chance to teach forgiveness an' how to love them that smack you in the jaw. About half this village is goin' to need such pious instructions."

Captain Bill enumerated his grievances.

He, the simple and honestly trustful captain and owner of the *Merry Maid*, had arrived some months before when

copra carriers were badly needed. He sold off his trade stores and set to work. The shrewd storekeepers and planters, finding that he was careless and haphazard, had been impudent and heartless in cheating him.

CAPTAIN BILL left his boat crew to doze in the warm shade near the shore. He went up along the beach. Near the edge of the town he came to a dark little hut with a broad, porch-like covering out in front that made the hut still darker.

In the gloom, behind the table that served as a counter, were glimpses of bright calico, tinned meats, clay pipes, colored candies.

As it was midafternoon, scarcely any one was astir in the village. Woo Lung's slim length lay in a cane chair before the table and he peered drowsily through the twilight-like shadows toward the bright splotches of sunlight.

Captain Bill Jones came around the corner with a long stride. His broken straw hat was on the back of his head. His sleeves were rolled far up on his brawny arms, and his torn shirt flared wide at the throat.

The Chinaman stirred into an upright position and, craftily cordial, said:

"'Lo, Cap'n." He gazed with slant-eyed keenness at Captain Bill's big bristly face and did not like the grin; then, "Hab dlink, Cap'n?"

"No, thanks. I'm 'spectin' to eat a Chinaman, raw—one about your size—pretty soon."

Woo Lung grinned and clucked appreciatively.

"You one velly funny man, Cap'n."

"An' the joke of it is, I've come for my fifty dollars."

"One month flom today I pay. Now no can do. One month, you come. You bet 'em you boots I pay that time, *maskee!*"

"Listen, you cockeyed son of the devil's first born. You're a disgrace to China. You've told me the same lie for three months. An' any self-respectin' Chinaman that wants to dodge a debt uses some originality. Hurts my pride to think you think I'm simple minded. I don't mind bein' lied to, but smoke of damnation! I want to be convinced."

"Oh, I no tell lie. No, no! I plopa numba one *ma-chin!*"

"You are like hell. When I chartered the *Merry Maid* to the grog bellied planters, I sold out what was left in my trade room to you for fifty dollars. I'm through an' leavin' this blasted island tomorrow. You know it. You know, too, that I'm goin' to celebrate my departure by pokin' numerous respectable citizens on the nose. I've done you the honor to pay you the first visit. An' there's just one way—besides committin' suicide—that you can get out of payin' me that fifty dollars right here—now—this minute."

"So? What you mean?"

Mr. Woo Lung looked blank and innocent, though he knew very well what was coming.

"Let that girl of yours marry my boy, Charley. He's a blasted fool, wantin' you in his family. I wouldn't marry the Queen o' Sheber if you were her tenth cousin."

"Oh, me like Cha'ley. Him velly fline boy. She no like 'm, Cap'n. Too much bad." Woo Lung clucked disconsolately.

"She's sung a different song to Charley. Fetch her out here. Let her tell me so."

"She go 'way."

"You sent 'er away."

"Oh, no, no."

"All right then. Start fishin' for my fifty dollars."

"No hab got."

"Suits me," said Captain Bill cheerily. "I'll take you to sea an' sweat it out of you."

He reached out a hand and closed on Woo Lung's shoulder. The Chinaman wriggled and squealed, begging.

"Ow, you hu't, Cap'n!"

Captain Bill grasped the Chinaman's thin ankle with the other hand, pulled him off the long cane chair, gave him a swing and tossed him across a brawny shoulder. Woo Lung writhed and squirmed, pleading.

Bill explained calmly:

"Allus best to have somebody on board you don't like. If you run outa grub or get shipwrecked, then you don't have no friendly feelin's to interfere with your dinner. We'll make you tender an' juicy—the same as natives do dogs—by

beatin' you black an' blue. Don't waste your strength by wigglin', chinky. You're goin' to need to scrub pots an' pans—till such time as we get shipwrecked an' are starvin'."

It would have been nothing much in Bill Jones's life to carry the Chinaman to sea; and Woo Lung knew it. Woo Lung was tricky and dishonest. He no more intended to give up that fifty dollars than to cut off a hand and let Bill have it as a souvenir. He squawked pleadingly and filled the air with promises.

Bill knew that the miserly Chinese valued fifty dollars more than his half-caste daughter who, most likely, unless properly married off, would turn into a common beach girl.

Woo Lung was thoroughly frightened. He was so scared that he was entirely honest in saying Charley could marry the girl; that is, he was honest for the moment at least.

"Good!" said Bill. "Now you're makin' sounds that are pleasin' to my ears." He pulled Woo Lung off his shoulder and dropped him on to the cane chair. "Whistle 'er out. I'll get Charley ashore an' in two jiffys an' a jump have 'em spliced, parceled an' frapped by the old judge himself. They'll be married so tight that when one stubs a toe the other 'n 'll holler."

Woo Lung panted and gasped. He rubbed at his shoulder. His slant eyes glistened hatefully. But he was afraid of this big red headed devil.

"Awlite, awlite," he said sullenly, no doubt already thinking how he could wriggle out of paying or of giving up his daughter to a mere native sailor—who had the unimportant distinction of being honest and faithful. "You come tonight. *Galowl*" He probably guessed that Captain Bill would be so busy with his farewell ceremonies after sundown that he would forget all about the flower-like Lalee. "But she no like Cha'ley. Maybe she lun away—"

"Not if you don't threaten to whale the daylight out of 'er, she won't. An' you do, I'll take your scrawny neck between my thumb an' forefinger an' break it. Now listen. Just pretend you understand plain English. I'm not comin' back. But tonight my boys are comin' up here. An' they either take her out to the ship, or they take you. The *Merry Maid* goes out on the midnight tide an' there's goin' to be some member of your family on board. Personally, I'd prefer you. But I like Charley well enough to be generous about it. Now understand, my boys are comin'. An' they do what I tell 'em to do—as a lot of worse rascals than you have found out."

Captain Bill clapped fist to palm, and the sound of the smack was like the report of a gun. The Chinaman's head trembled in hasty nods, humbly; but his black eyes had the veiled look of a man who is hiding his thoughts.

CAPTAIN BILL, whistling, went back to the beach. His mate, the halfbreed, Harry, saw him coming and kicked the boat crew awake.

The halfbreed was squat, thick of chest, big of thigh. His nose had been broken and was still flat; a tooth or two were gone; he had been slashed across the cheek in a way that balefully distorted his right eye. Two or three puckered scars on his body showed where bullets had struck. All of which in Captain Bill Jones's eyes were marks of beauty; for Harry, the halfbreed Tongan, would go into a fight as quick as any man and stay as long. He would do whatever Captain Bill said, which was a tall order for a man, since Captain Bill was likely to say anything.

"Harry, that Chinaman's gin is the worst in the South Seas. It's so bad we ought to thank 'im, since we're not tempted to drink it, hmm? Now poke out your ears an' harken."

Harry grinned, showing the missing teeth. He had the face and body of a battered bulldog. The four other boys, blacks and halfbreeds, strapping fellows, nosed up close to listen with black heads cocked sidewise like eager terriers.

"Did you ever see that chink girl?"

"Naw," said Harry. "But Charley he say—"

"Never mind what Charley he says. He's in love. An' the eyesight of a man in love is no more to be trusted than a rotten rope. Woo Lung 'll have the girl up to his store tonight. He'll prob-

ably have her scared into saying she don't want to come away with you. But you bring her—or bring him. Don't let Charley know. It's to be a birthday surprise. I don't know when his birthday falls—don't think he knows—but it'll be a birthday present. Charley's no such liar as to say the girl loves him when she don't. Stow 'er away aft. An' have ever'thing ready to get to sea at next tide turn.

"I don't ever expect to come back to this place again. I'm goin' to fix it so I won't dare come back. Otherwise I might get tender hearted an' show up here again just to give the village some more entertainment. Have a boat waitin' for me after 'leven o'clock. An' if anybody but myself is drunk when the *Merry Maid* goes to sea, I'll throw 'im overboard for a *wittee-wittee!*" The *wittee-wittee* is a native fishhook used for trolling.

"Yes, sar," said Harry. "You bet bottom-side dollar Charley he be happy man or Harry—" he poked a thumb against his own barrel chest—"he be liar. Harry he tell lie to no man!" He stuck out his jaw and bobbed his head emphatically.

"Yeah, but we have to tell 'em to women, don't we? No other way to make 'em believe us," said Captain Bill.

Then, with much profanity, he gave final and explicit instructions. He swore as naturally, and often with as little meaning, as he snored; but, toward the crew at least, he was entirely good natured about it.

Captain Bill then returned toward the village, taking a short cut. As he passed by the native huts, men half asleep roused up to chirp and grin with friendly welcome; pretty girls and their fat mothers smiled and waved beckoningly. Only the more pious natives, deacons and such, fellows who liked the bossiness of reproving the more wayward, looked askance at Captain Bill. Tehuala, like many islands of that day, was under a pretty rigid missionary control.

Just after he first came to the village, about three months before, the native police, who held appointments through the missionary magistrate, had tried to arrest Captain Bill for a little moonlight festivity where some flower bedecked maidens danced and sang in the forbidden pagan way. There were more black eyes and swollen noses in church the next Sunday than are usually seen in jail the morning after an Irish wake. Bill insisted that there were only two people who could arrest him without an argument; one was the President of the United States and the other was the captain of any one of her Majesty's gunboats—providing he got up close.

There had been a big hullaballoo over Captain Bill's refusing to go to the rickety bamboo jail and be fined. The stern powers of law and order were dismayed. The more unregenerate natives, who were as ready to discard the new teachings as to slip out of their hot, scratchy trousers and flappy Mother Hubbards, thought Bill was about the finest white man that had ever landed on the beach. Under the orders of the stern magistrate, Bill would have been boycotted absolutely by natives and merchants, had not the planters who needed the *Merry Maid* paid the heavy fine and fabricated a long and humble apology. Bill would no more have apologized than he would have pulled his eyeteeth and laid them on a contribution plate; and as for paying a fine to anybody he could lick—never!

Captain Bill brought up at Mr. Simpson's store, and there paused. He gave his broken hat a pull to one side, fished a bit of paper from his pocket, scratched his head and eyed the chit, muttering noiselessly to himself like a schoolboy hastily brushing up on the multiplication table before he goes in to tell the teacher about it.

Bill closed his eyes and murmured cabalistically:

"Two—one, two, four—three. Four—thirty—one—six. Ten—four—five."

Then he nodded, put the paper back into his pocket, grinned and went into the store.

A pallid white man moved dispiritedly out of the store shadows.

"'Lo," said Bill.

"Good afternoon, sir," said the ghostly man, who did not like Captain Bill.

"Simpson here?"

"Mr. Simpson is very busy, sir. Can't be disturbed."

"The hell he can't," said Bill. "You'll

see. I'll disturb 'im plenty."

And as if the pallid man were indeed a ghost and as easily walked by as a bit of drifting fog, Bill brushed him aside and went to the back of the store where, without pausing, he put his shoulder to a door and pushed as if to carry away bolts and locks. The door, however, was not locked.

Mr. Simpson lay on a bunk, busily snoring. Natives and white men usually snoozed through the hot afternoons. Unless a fellow was drunk, Bill regarded daytime sleeping as an unmanly weakness. It was even more of a weakness for a man not to be able to carry liquor on upright legs.

With shake, tug, pinch, and the seagoing shout of, "Two feet on deck—all hands! With shirt tails stowed!" Bill roused Mr. Simpson into a startled awakening.

HE WAS a dry, angular man —one of the sundry sun dried that Captain Bill had spoken of—with sunken eyes and wrinkled cheeks. A shrewd, miserly fellow, who had his long fingers into all sorts of island business, and made a good thing out of chandlering to island shipping. Dry and leathery as he was, his face and body were adrip with sweat, and his mouth lined with snorer's cotton.

"Ah—er—ho, Captain Jones!" said Mr. Simpson, unpleasantly amazed, yet wanting to show business-like affability. "I thought you had sailed."

"Did you now?" said Captain Bill. "Without goodby to my friends? Tut-tut-tut! Got your money all right from them Dutchmen, I hope?"

Bill persisted in calling the planters who had chartered his brig Dutchmen; they weren't, but the name annoyed them.

"Er—yes—yes," said Mr. Simpson.

"Quite a lot o' stores an' gear I bought from you, Mr. Simpson. I wanted to make sure they'd honored the order."

Bill had signed an order whereby the planters were to pay Mr. Simpson and deduct the amount from the *Merry Maid's* account.

"You 'member," Bill went on, "I didn't stop for you to figger it all up. So I'm cur'ous as to just how much it come to?"

"They've given you a statement?" Mr. Simpson asked cautiously. "It's slipped my mind."

Mr. Simpson, knowing a good deal about the business methods of his shrewd friends, suspected that they had padded the statement. He did not care to embarrass his friends by disclosing that fact to Bill. As long as Mr. Simpson made a good profit he was willing that other men should also find the transaction profitable. But Mr. Simpson felt uncomfortable to see the careless, haphazard Captain Bill Jones grow business-like.

"Slipped your mind, has it?" Captain Bill turned to the door. With a hurricane shout that set tin pans a-shiver on their shelf, he called, "Hey, you, Jim! Fetch Mr. Simpson his store log! His mind's slippin'!"

"I'll get it," said Mr. Simpson, making a timid move toward the door.

Bill's broad shoulders barred the way.

"No, no. When your mind's slippin' it's best to stay quiet—'r lay down an' sprawl out."

The dispirited Jim came with the account book, asking uncertainly—

"Did you want this, Mr. Simpson?"

Before the nervous Mr. Simpson could answer, Captain Bill, roughly but with no ill nature, pulled the clerk into the room.

"Now find my account, Jim."

Mr. Simpson smacked his dry lips and fidgeted. After all, he could not be held responsible for whatever the planters had added to the bill.

"I'll find it, Jim," said Mr. Simpson, and took the book. "You 'tend store."

Simpson found the account. He ran a long, clerical finger down the items and paused at the total of $628. Apprehensively—

"That's correct, ain't it, Captain?"

"Hope so," said Captain Bill. "They charged me $828."

"A clerical error, Captain. That's all. The best of us make mistakes. A slip of the pen."

"Hmm. Write me out on a piece o' paper that all you had comin' was $628. I'll make 'em see that mistake if I have to take their heads down to some o' my

Solomon Island friends who pay well for such things—perticularly white men's."

"But a slip of the pen, Captain! A mere slip of the pen!"

"Pens are slip'ry things," Bill agreed. "Write me what I told you."

Mr. Simpson sat down at a small table, fiddled with the pen point, bit the end of the pen holder, examined and discarded various pieces of paper, and cocked an uneasy eye at Bill, who stood holding the account book, poking at the various items with a calloused forefinger.

"There you are, Captain," said Mr. Simpson, offering the paper and reaching for the account book. Reprovingly, "You shouldn't examine my private accounts!"

"Private the devil! Whose account is 'this? Mine 'r yours? 'Supplies to the *Merry Maid*. William Jones, captain an' owner.' Flames o' brimstone an' the devil's singed beard!"

"Don't curse, Captain! Don't curse!" said Mr. Simpson with a protective gesture toward his withered ears.

"I ain't cussin'. I'm jus' gaspin'. See here. I bought a lot o' cordage f'r my own use—an' speculation. You sell 'er by the hundredweight. How much length in a hundredweight o' two-inch rope?"

Mr. Simpson made queer sounds, expressive of amazement.

"I'll tell you," said Captain Bill. "For two-inch, one hundred twenty-four fathoms an' three feet. F'r four-inch, thirty fathoms, one foot, six inches. Ten-inch cables, four fathoms, five feet."

Mr. Simpson stood aghast before such precision.

"An' we made the *Merry Maid* a rope walk. Measured ever' foot, an'—"

"I sell by the weight, not the foot!" Mr. Simpson shouted.

"But my supercargo—"

"Your supercargo?"

"You bet. Mr. Lawton. A smart boy. He fished a commercial dictionary, that I never opened in my life, out o' the cabin an'—"

"If I've made an error, Captain—we all make mistakes!"

"We sure do," Bill agreed. "An' mine's been not to watch you closer. Here you've got me down for five cases o' trade tobacco. Only three come aboard. My supercargo—" Bill pronounced it as if saying "my guardian angel"—"he wrote 'er all down."

"But he may have made a mistake, Captain!" Mr. Simpson cried desperately.

"You're makin' one to think o' such a thing. 'McCulloch's Commercial Dictionary'—" Bill rolled the words out with a sound of great learning—"says so much weight ought to have so many feet. Like a centerpede. You come from the States, Simpson. You've seen a farmer's wife wring a chicken's neck. That's jus' how I'm goin' to wring yours. My supercargo figgered out that the proper tonnage on this bill is just $453. Do I get my rebate? I'm askin' p'lite!"

Mr. Simpson spluttered and groaned. He argued in much the same tone as if begging for his life. Captain Bill, having a good time, listened attentively; but whenever Simpson paused inquiringly, Bill shook his head.

Mr. Simpson collapsed weakly. He sat at the table, figuring.

"Four-fifty-three from six-two-eight. All right. I'm robbing myself, but I'll pay you the seventy-five dollars' difference."

Captain Bill examined the figures.

"You've made another mistake. It's *two*-seventy-five."

Mr. Simpson gave a start and returned solicitously to the numbers. Then, grinning with sickly cheerfulness:

"We both made a mistake. It is one-seventy-five. That's it."

"I figger it as two-seventy-five."

"But you're wrong. See? Look here. I'll show you."

Bill looked and listened; but he firmly insisted that 453 subtracted from 628 left 275. Sweat dripped from the scrawny Simpson. He expounded and groaned, almost prayed; offered to leave the problem to Jim, the clerk—to anybody.

"This is between you an' me," said Captain Bill. "An' I don't trust your figgerin'."

At last it dawned on Mr. Simpson that Captain Bill was not as stupid as he pretended. He was, punitively, after an extra hundred dollars. Mr. Simpson whined, almost wept and nearly swore. Bill was calm as a clam at high tide, and looked pleased.

Simpson groaned weakly and reached into a chest for a canvas sack of dollars. He spilled them on the table and began to count deftly.

"No Chilean dollars f'r me!" said Captain Bill with the tone and gesture of a man refusing limburger cheese.

Simpson protested, lying. He said Bill's account had been figured in Chilean dollars. Bill was unimpressed. It was the South Sea merchant's way to buy in Chilean dollars and sell for American, or for British pounds.

"I won't!" Simpson squawked. "You're a robber! You ought to be hung! I'll get even!"

Captain Bill swiftly and powerfully put out two hands. They closed on Simpson's turtle-like neck, choking him. Terror jumped into Simpson's face. He tried to scream, but only wheezed as if suffocated. His long fingers tore at Bill's hands. He might as well have been plucking at the links of an iron cable. With a sweep of his foot Bill knocked Simpson's feet from under him and threw him over on to the cot. There was no sound of a scuffle—there *was* no scuffle. Captain Bill was young, powerful, used to this sort of thing though not often so gentle about it. With seamanly skill and haste he had Simpson gagged and triced with toes barely to the floor.

The inquiring clerk had slipped up to see what was going on, gasped loud in horror, and then turned to run. Bill went after him, caught him, jerked him up into his arms and brought him back into the little room. Jim, the clerk, squeaked and gasped, begging for his life. Or he thought he was begging for his life. Captain Bill rolled him up in a blanket as the natives roll a piece of pork in a plantain leaf, leaving his head out, but thrusting a wadding of cloth into his mouth.

"It's got to be a fine world, it has," said Captain Bill, "when an honest sailor has to act like a thief to get what's due 'im!"

Bill then acted the part perfectly. He pawed about until he uncovered Mr. Simpson's little bag of gold. He counted out $275, thumping it piece by piece on the table before Simpson's maddened eyes to show he was not taking a dollar more than he had claimed.

"An' somethin' extra for rope an' tobacco I didn't get!" he said.

Then he shut up the store, just as if there was no one on hand to receive customers, and went his way.

CHAPTER II

CAPTAIN BILL SIGNS A PASSENGER

SOUTH SEAS society, much like society elsewhere, judges men by the clothes they wear. Captain Bill was a bold lad. Gold jingled in his pocket. He marched right through the village, along the graveled roadway and up the hillside to the Cloverland Hotel. His bare feet, calloused as a native's, did not mind the sharp gravel. He grinned as he strode forward. Now and then nice looking persons on horseback, men and women, rode by him. The planters and planters' sons lifted up their noses and pretended not to see Captain Bill.

The women stared frankly. They knew who he was, though perhaps they had never seen him before—at least not so close. One pretty maiden with brown curls in a tangle and sitting her saddle gracefully, let her glance linger across her shoulder as she rode by. Captain Bill winked at her. She turned away hastily, glanced at her companion—a rather pasty looking lump of dough with a down-drooping mustache and liverish eyes—then she, with a quick turn in the saddle, looked back toward Captain Bill, smiled and winked at him.

Thereupon it seemed to Bill that he was walking on air, not gravel, just because a friendly little minx had tossed him the flip of an eyelid.

Three times a week the planters, their wives and daughters and friends came of an evening to the Cloverland Hotel to dine, dance, play cards, flirt and exchange scandal. It was rather like their club house. It was wrong—and forbidden—for the natives to dance, gamble or drink; but native musicians furnished music at the Cloverland, and natives gathered in the perfumed shadows to listen and look on.

Captain Bill had some business with a couple of planters, and counted on finding them at the hotel. As he drew near he realized that he was hungry and

thirsty; and if he did not have the clothes, he at least had the money. Clothes or no clothes, he would eat at the Cloverland. Pretty brown eyes and a tangle of curly hair had made Captain Bill reckless.

He turned off at a little stream and followed it into the shadows. There he took off his shirt and trousers, shook them, and washed the dust from his body. He combed his red hair with wet fingers and ran his hand doubtfully over his bristly cheeks. Captain Bill may or may not have reflected that his red hair spun itself up into bushy curls when it dried after being dampened. He did know that his good friends among the Solomon Islands wanted his head because of the redness of the hair. More than once they had frankly told him so and tried to take it; all of which Captain Bill considered all right—as long as they didn't succeed.

Captain Bill lingered long at his bath, enjoying the fresh water and the coolness of drying off in the warm shade. He was hungry, and thirsty with the thirst of a camel that is dry in all eight stomachs, or however many stomachs a camel has.

Twilight flashed its dark signal, and night came promptly about the time that Captain Bill, barefoot, wearing a denim shirt that flared wide at the throat, and canvas trousers spotted with tar, and carrying his wreck of a straw hat, stepped on to the lantern-lit Cloverland veranda.

The native servants were scurrying about, laying out tableware and placing flowers. On the far side of the veranda there was the tinkle of glasses and drone of talk, the sparkle of women's laughter, the haw-haw of men. The guests mingled and drank, waiting for dinner.

Captain Bill looked about him, saw that he was early, but didn't mind; and so sat down at the first table. The waiters took one look, and a scurrying messenger went for Cloverland.

He came. Cloverland was a big, pouchy man who ate heartily and drank much. He was proud of being patronized by the planters, and did all that was possible to please them.

"Here! Here!" said Cloverland, blurting the words and towering angrily. "You can't eat here! Go 'way. Get out!"

Captain Bill cocked his head to one side, looked the big hotel man up and down and said:

"You inter-rest me, mister. Say some more."

"Drunk!" said Cloverland.

"Purt-near right," said Bill. "I'm goin' to be in about an hour."

Cloverland grew apoplectically angered. He reached out a hand for the back of Bill's shirt collar. His hand was knocked aside and Bill slowly stood up.

Captain Bill was a tall six feet, and that without even stockings. His arms were muscled like a hawser twist; his shoulders broad from the heave of sea work.

Cloverland grew slightly respectful. He said:

"But these tables are all taken. It's planters' night."

"I know what night it is." Bill grinned. He wanted to be friendly. "Then jus' poke a little table over to one side f'r me, where I can set an' look on. I'll pay to the hilt."

Bill temptingly held out a handful of gold.

Gold was gold, but planters had more of it than Captain Bill, who looked like a beachcomber. The planters would be offended, and might even establish their own club—as they threatened to do when Cloverland's service wasn't as they wanted it—if such shabby outsiders as this were permitted to intrude upon their society.

"Let's go where we can talk," said Cloverland. Then, deceptively, "Perhaps it can be arranged." And as Bill was hesitating suspiciously, he added, "Perhaps I can let you have one of my suits."

Captain Bill glanced down at his clothes, then stared for a moment toward a far corner of the veranda where he caught glimpses of men in white suits and silk shirts talking with women. He saw the little curly headed miss with brown eyes who had smiled at him.

"All right," he said to the hotel keeper.

Cloverland led the way.

"You go down there and wait till I come. I've something to attend to first."

Bill walked off the veranda and stood in the shadows, waiting.

CLOVERLAND, before he prospered and rose in society, had been the keeper of a Singapore dance hall. He knew how to handle roughs. He went to his room and got a revolver. The important thing had been to get Captain Bill off the veranda, out of the way. It would not do to have a scene before guests.

When he returned to where Bill was waiting, he said:

"Come on over here. We'll talk."

Lanterns, like huge fireflies caught in the foliage, were hung here and there about the grounds. When they came to a turn in the pathway some hundred feet from the veranda, Cloverland stopped short.

"Now take yourself off—clear off! Your kind are not wanted here! D'ye hear!"

The gun was leveled straight at Bill's head.

Cloverland never could quite remember just what happened. A gun at his head never meant much to Captain Bill except as an unmistakable sign that the other fellow was looking for trouble. Bill's left hand flew up like the snap of a hawser when it parts under strain, and clinched Cloverland's hand; at the same time his right fist, with two hundred pounds of sea hardened muscle behind it, came squarely against Cloverland's jaw. Cloverland went down as if shot through the heart.

"Soft jaw," said Bill critically, bending over him. He had wrenched the gun loose and held it idly. "Now what'd he want to do that for, I wonder?" Bill shook his head, mystified; but a moment later, "All on account of the clothes I wear? Hmm. Well, he said he'd loan me some of his. An' by the Lord Harry, he will, too, right here an' now!"

A few minutes later Captain Bill was admiringly craning his neck at all angles in the dim light, much as a peacock twists its neck to have a look at its fine feathers. He wore white duck trousers and coat, a little rumpled and slightly grass stained; also a purple silk shirt, and necktie that was rather badly tied, but was nevertheless a necktie. Moreover, Captain Bill had on shoes. He had not troubled himself with stockings. The trousers were a little short in the legs, but big at the waist. The coat was binding at the shoulders, but flappy in front. With a good deal of reluctance he discarded his old straw hat. He liked that hat.

Mr. Cloverland, with the sleeve of an old shirt tightly rammed into his mouth, his hands tied behind him and ankles bound, lay in his underwear under the dark shade of an hibiscus where Captain Bill had rolled him.

Captain Bill patted the revolver down into a hip pocket, then plucked a four-inch hibiscus. He carefully poked it into his buttonhole, patted the coat lapel, straightened his shoulders and, with the leisurely assurance of a well dressed man, returned to the veranda.

The guests had come to the tables. The servants looked doubtfully at Captain Bill, and knew that he was in Cloverland's clothes, but did not know what arrangements had been made with their master. The planters eyed him and the women stared. Bill was a fine looking man. He needed a shave, his hair wanted trimming, and his hands were stained with tar; his clothes didn't fit and the shoes hurt his feet, but he looked like a man—or rather, Man. There was no bulge to his belly, nothing bloodshot about his eyes, no trace of sickliness on his muscular face. Most white men, if long in the South Seas, have something unhealthy about them. Many of the men wore gardenias in their buttonholes; Bill had an hibiscus big enough to serve as the lid of a tea kettle —but also the breadth of shoulders to carry a flower of that size.

A pretty native girl whom Cloverland had trained as a sort of headwaitress smiled, beckoned, spoke as if she knew him, called him "Cap'n Bill," and placed him at an obscure table by himself.

Captain Bill's fingers groped in his pocket among his gold coins. He was reassured in the knowledge that he could pay, whatever the cost.

Overhead Japanese lanterns glowed, dangling from wires. Musicians strummed. There was the clack of dishes and clink of glasses, hum and buzz of talk. Now and then some one asked petulantly for Cloverland.

Captain Bill was hungry. He emptied

one bottle of wine as fast as he could fill his glass, and ordered another. His eyes roved with a steady look over the faces of the diners. He spotted Mr. Jorks, one of the planters with whom he had business, then searched for Mr. Malloy, the other and more important.

He found the curly headed, brown eyed girl first and saw that she was beside the doughy man with the drooping mustache. Then Bill discovered that the bulky Malloy was at the very same table.

Bill drank more wine and ordered still more. This stuff had a pleasant flavor, but no more body than cider.

He felt a little rebuked because the pretty brown eyed girl did not once appear to notice him. Bill did not at all reproach her. He was humbly respectful toward women—good women at least—especially if they were pretty. Had she been a barmaid or a beach girl, Bill would very readily have sent the pudgy, doughy man scampering. He knew how to woo barmaids and beach girls; and, which showed greater wisdom, how to forget them promptly.

He was rather moodily finishing off his third bottle of wine when the pretty native waitress came near, smiled, glanced about, then bent so low that Bill, a little nervously but not at all displeased, thought she was about to kiss him. However she merely whispered softly:

"Miss Malloy say please you meet her behin' carriage house. You go wait. She come. You do it?" She gave Bill a furtive, urgent nudge and repeated coaxingly, "You do it?"

"Hmm. Who's she?"

"Ho! You make fun with me, Cap'n Bill. You know her! She over there with Missar Malloy an' Missar Pleu."

"What she want, hey?"

"Ho-ho! You funny, Cap'n Bill! What you think? One thing, she don't want marry Missar Pleu!"

The pretty waitress left him. Bill's steady eyes roved toward Miss Malloy. He had doubts about that message. Miss Malloy was poking a mango with a spoon, and apparently had no other thought in the world than to eat the pulp without having the slippery seeds pop into her lap. Bill had a short way with mangoes: He would poke them into his mouth, suck vigorously and spit out seeds and skin.

As he stared straight at Miss Malloy, she lifted her eyes and met his gaze with a steady, blank look, then lowered her eyes and dropped her head—vaguely nodding, as if confirming the message.

That was enough for Bill. He signaled the boy who was passing cigars, and took a big handful. He calmly thrust them down into his blouse pockets. The boy gaped at his half empty box and let his mouth hang open; then closed his mouth and beamed as Captain Bill handed him a gold coin.

THERE was no light behind the carriage house. It was black with thick shadows. Bill went around in front, took down a lantern and tied it to a tree near where he was waiting. He was not going to talk to a pretty girl in the dark.

He threw away a half smoked cigar and lighted another. Somehow these cigars did not taste as they should. He was used to strong, gummy pipes and "niggerhead." He missed the fierce bite of tobacco. Aroma was something too fleeting and delicate for his taste.

The shoes pinched his feet. He rubbed his toes, and wished he might take off the boots, but thought he ought to be fully dressed to talk with a girl like Miss Malloy.

He heard light steps on the gravel and at once placed himself near the lantern where he could be seen. The steps paused. Captain Bill, who would wade into a room full of fighting men for the worthy purpose of showing 'em just how it ought to be done, felt funny sensations around his stomach. It was queer and uncomfortable. He saw a vague shadow linger for a moment beside the house, then the girl, suddenly resolute, almost ran up to him. She touched his arm with fluttering hands. Worried smiles and frowns trembled across her pretty face as she stared up at him. Her voice was low, nervous, and a kind of humble pleading was in her words:

"Oh, Captain Bill, you will, won't you—help me? I almost turned there on the road to ask you. And when I saw you at dinner I just made up my mind

I *would* ask. And, please, you must! Listen, Captain Bill, I know all about you—"

"Holy thunder, I hope you don't!" said Bill, sidling back just a little.

"I do! Ahiana's brother is our houseboy and—"

"Who the devil's Ah'ana?"

"Why, the waitress. The girl who told you to come here and wait for me."

"Oh, I see. Who's her brother?"

"The boy you used to call Mike when he sailed with you. He makes us call him Mike too."

"That young rascal! He's lazy enough to be a good houseboy."

"He's always talking of you. He told me all about you long ago. 'My Cap'n Bill,' he calls you."

"Awful liar, that Mike."

"He isn't. Nothing of the kind! And he told how you carried the two shipwrecked girls back to Sydney—gave up your trading trip, lost money, just to hurry them home."

"They was sick. Had to get 'em to a doctor. I give 'em ever'thing I had in the medicine chest—but, hell, it didn't help."

"And how you whipped Black Darley the trader for beating his native wife, then took her home to her own island—"

"Aw—I was achin' for a row with that fellow. If he'd kicked a dog I'd have told him it was mine."

"I know, I know," she said hastily, and took hold of Bill's big arm. "But I am worse than shipwrecked! Worse than if a man beat me, and I haven't a friend!"

"Who's put a hand on you?" asked Bill, growling like a dog that bristles its neck.

"No one yet, but worse is coming!"

"Your father 'll fix 'em."

"Father? I have no father. He is dead. That's why if you don't help me, no one will."

"Then who's Malloy?"

"An uncle. Guardian. I won't be of age until next month, and must marry that monstrous Pleu next week!"

"Yeah?"

"He's been married twice before, and always to some girl with property. Now it is I. My uncle and Pleu want to combine their estates. Oh, I will kill myself if—please, Captain Bill, won't you take me to Nello Island?"

"To where!"

"Nello Island."

Oaths rippled out of Bill's mouth. They did not sound harsh; they were just a gurgling overflow of emotion.

"Nello Island! Hell's blazes an' the devil's sore toe! There's nothin' worse in the South Seas. An' it's down there, when hell gets full, they stow the overflow. Why, that bunch o' Nello cannibals don't even go to the trouble to cook you!"

"I've friends there, Captain Bill. Relatives—cousins. The Stantons—"

"I know 'em. An' when they wake up of a mornin' they don't know which one o' their niggers 'll eat 'em before night. They went to Nello because the land is rich an' to be had for the takin'. I know. Big family. Girl about your age. Hell of a place to take women. I've told Stanton so."

"But he has boys from the Solomon Islands and—"

"Don't I know all about it? I recruited 'em for him. Most of 'em. An' what lies I told to get 'em to go there, too!"

"Mrs. Stanton is my cousin— Will you take me, Captain Bill?"

"Hmm. So you don't want to marry this Phew, or Pleu, eh? Well, how'd it be if I took *him?* I don't like any man that marries a woman if she don't want 'im. This world's full of fool women. Let 'im look around an' find one that does want 'im. An' see here, miss. How'd it be if I had a talk with your uncle an' this Pleu? I can crack their heads together an' make 'em listen!"

"It won't do the least good, Captain Bill. My uncle keeps control of my property until I am married—no matter how old I am. My father thought a woman couldn't possibly know anything about business. Perhaps he was right. And—oh, I know you won't believe it, but my uncle has threatened to have me declared insane and locked up as a prisoner if I don't marry Pleu! That's why I promised and pretended to be willing. But when I saw you— You will take me to Nello, won't you, Captain Bill?"

Captain Bill scratched his head. She

was a pretty little thing, with a look in her eyes that he liked. And her eyes were begging, pleading. Her two hands held to his arm, clingingly.

"There'll be a howling hellabooloo if I carry you off."

"But to my own relatives?"

"The Stantons are fine people."

"Please, please! *Please,* Captain Bill!"

"I don't mind kickin' up such a shindy they'll never want to see me again on this island, but I'd hate like hell to go so far they would want to see me again an' have gunboats on the lookout to fetch me back. So far I've kept to windward of the law purty well. Takes nice sailin' to do that—in this climate. But breath o' the devil, a girl's got the right to go visit relatives, ain't she? 'Course she has. An' take passage on any craft she wants? Bet your life! So to make this strictly business, young lady—I'm careful as a Scotchman in all business matters—" said Bill, looking solemn—"you are to pay me for passage. Let's see. Hmm. Cabin passenger, you'll be. You won't like the food. You won't like the smell o' the ship. You won't like the cockroaches. You won't like—"

"Oh, I'll like anything if I am only going away from here! And I'll—or have Mr. Stanton—pay you anything you say, Captain Bill."

"All right then. Five dollars—one pound. Yes 'm!"

She laughed nervously and squeezed at his arm much as she would have impulsively squeezed a big St. Bernard.

Then—

"Will you take this?" she asked and stripped a ring from her finger.

Bill took it gingerly, held it near the lantern, squinted.

"Diamond?"

"Yes."

"It's worth a lot."

"It's worth nothing to me. As soon as I am off this island I will throw it into the sea!"

"Hmm." Bill jiggled it in the light. He was interested in the sparkler. "That fellow give it to you, hmm? Must like you."

"Oh, don't! It's the same ring—ugh! Two other wives. He took it off their fingers when they died."

What Bill said can't be repeated, but the girl did not seem to mind. He wound up with:

"I sure don't want it, either. But your passage is paid, miss."

"Captain Bill, my name is Jeanne."

"Nice name," said Bill, approving. "An' you want passage on my ship. Well, I got some business to attend to first."

He moved the diamond about in the light.

"But I must get away—now—at once. They will miss me and search."

"You go back there to the hotel till I get my business attended to. Then we'll go."

"Will you take somebody's horse?" she asked.

"Horse? Me! What could I do on a horse—except fall off?"

"But it's over two miles."

"You can ride. I'll walk."

"No," she said firmly. "I'll have one of the boys put Mr. Malloy's horses to the surrey. Then I will go back on the veranda and wait. You have Ahiana tell me when you are ready. Then we'll leave together and drive down."

"That," said Captain Bill, "will be fine."

"You won't back out? You will take me?"

"'Course I'll take you. Don't you know a captain can be sued if he don't keep his contracts with passengers, unless some acts of God interfere? I'm too careful a business man to run any risks of gettin' sued!"

CHAPTER III

PAYMENT—THROUGH THE NOSE

CAPTAIN BILL returned to the veranda. With head up and eyes fixed in a searching stare, he walked among the dancers. He was bumped against and had his feet stepped on by persons who glowered indignantly. There were petulant comments, and the fretful inquiry of, "Where is Cloverland? To permit such a lout—" All of which meant nothing to Bill.

Unable to find whom he sought, he grabbed the arm of a native boy who was scurrying off with an empty tray.

"Where's Malloy? Where's Jorks? Where's that Phew fellow?"

"Ho, missar, they play po-kar. I go now get drink for 'um. They in room upstair."

"Poker, hmm? Get the drinks an' give that tray to me. I'll take it up."

"Missar Clov'land he no like. No, no."

"Show me that room."

Captain Bill, having been shown, went up the wide stairs and into a big, airy room. Five men under a thick haze of cigar smoke were playing cards with gold and silver on the table. All being at the moment intent on the pot, no one glanced up as Captain Bill came in. Though it made the shoes pinch that much more, he rose to his tiptoes and quietly went near.

The showdown came. Pasty Pleu had numerous aces, and his pudgy, soft hands pulled in the pot.

Jorks, as he cast away his cards, looked up—doubtfully.

"Oh, hello, Bill."

" 'Lo," said Bill, eyeing the gold Pleu was stacking.

"Ha, hello there, Bill," the bulky Malloy exclaimed, with a tone more of mockery than friendliness. "I thought you had sailed."

"No, I stopped over so as to be sure an' tell ever'body goodby."

"Want to play some poker?"

"No, I'm careful not to break the laws," said Bill, sarcastically.

Gambling was not permitted on the island; at least, natives were arrested, fined, and the fines were worked out on the road for such an offense.

"That's a nice shirt, Bill," said Jorks. "Looks like one of Cloverland's."

" 'Tis. He loaned it to me so I could eat up here."

"Thoughtful of him," one of the other men commented, sneeringly.

"Yeah, very," said Bill, eyeing the man.

"When do you sail, Bill?" Jorks asked.

"Depends. I don't sail till I get all that's owin' to me from you two Dutchmen!"

"Owing to you?" exclaimed Jorks.

"Why, our manager's settled with you," said Malloy, bristling.

"Sure. He settled with me. But I ain't settled with you fellows yet. An' any time you two fat bellied Dutchmen think I'm goin' to pay a fine for pokin' niggers on the nose—"

"But we *had* to pay it!" said Jorks.

"The magistrate would 've libeled your ship," Malloy bellowed. "Then where'd our contract have been?"

"Hell, she's been libeled before. An' I sailed off with the guards that was put on board. Made damn good sailors out of 'em, too, before they got on shore again."

"But we had to pay this fine," Jorks repeated.

"If you had to pay it, then why the billycock o' hell did you charge it 'gainst me?"

At that moment the pasty Pleu, who, having a lucky streak, did not want the poker game interrupted, said:

"Jorks, you and Malloy! Why don't you tell this disgusting fellow to get out, and wait until you are at leisure?"

"I'm glad you spoke up," said Bill. "I almost forgot you. Here—"

Bill put his hand to the table, laid down a diamond ring, then calmly took up about a hundred dollars' worth of gold pieces and dropped them into his pocket.

Men stared with bulging eyes. It looked like the most casual sort of impudent robbery. Pleu bent to the ring, clapped a hand on it and, half rising from his chair, turned demandingly on Bill:

"What do you you mean? Give back that money! This is my ring—how did you get it?"

"Set down. You got your ring, an' I got my reward—for bein' honest."

"You stole it!" cried Pleu.

"No, all wrong. Never in my life stole somethin' I didn't want. An'," Bill added, frowning down upon the bloated face, "I sure don't want anything that's been stole from dead women." Bill put his palm almost against Pleu's face. "Now, I'm talkin' with Jorks an' Malloy here. You or anybody else interfere an' I'll give a sample of some bulls in a Chinaman's shop. Set down."

Bill then tossed the statement he had got from the storekeeper, Simpson, at Malloy.

"Read that. You damn robbers charged me $200 more than you paid Simpson. Do I get it back—an' that fine money too—or just take it out in

the pleasure o' bitin' your noses off?"

"But, Bill," said Jorks hastily, wanting to soothe, "if there's been a mistake—"

"If you want to talk business to us, come during the day!" the bulky Malloy shouted. "Simpson's a liar, anyhow!"

"You bet," Bill agreed. "Awful liar. So are you. I'm not talkin' business. This here is pleasure for me. An' if I don't get that money, I'm goin' to have some o' the nicest mem'ries I ever laid awake to think about."

Captain Bill grinned expressively.

"What d' you say, Malloy?" Jorks asked, feeling weak.

Malloy glowered under bushy brows. It was not his way to pay back anything. He had made his way by being cruel and dishonest. A black name he had, but wealth enough to cover it over; and he wasn't wholly a coward, but quick to use a lot of caution.

It nearly choked Malloy to do it, but he began to whistle another tune, to talk about "mistakes" and suggest that this wasn't the time to talk business, or for anybody to get angry. And all the while he was angry enough to blow up.

While he was talking there began to be heard from below a vague commotion, excited voices, thrilled exclamations. All in the room cocked their heads, listening.

The commotion became a scramble and throbbing patter on the stairs; and above it all a loud voice bellowed commands. Then there was a strong surge at the door. The door, as if blown by a high wind, flew open.

Cloverland lurched in with a too-short kimono flapping in disarray about his underwear. He looked half crazy—and was. There was a big bruise that discolored one side of his face. With him was the lanky Simpson, a gun in his hand, and Jim, the pallid clerk, looking more ghostly than ever. They had worked out of their lashings, roused the town with a story of robbery, and followed Captain Bill's trail to the hotel, arriving just as Cloverland's groans had attracted the search to him.

"Huh. All my friends has come," said Captain Bill. Then, giving Cloverland's short kimono and underwear a critical stare, he added, "You ain't dressed fit for company."

"You'll be hanged for this!" Cloverland bellowed, and added a bunch of juicy oaths.

"He robbed me!" Simpson bleated, poking out the revolver with a wavering, claw-like hand.

There was a crowd of natives and white men surging and pushing behind Cloverland and Simpson, chattering confused advice, crying:

"Catch 'im! Take 'im!"

The men about the poker table pushed their chairs and rose; some called nervously, "Don't shoot!" as Simpson waggled his revolver. They were in line of fire.

"You un'er 'rest!" shouted a half-breed sergeant of police, who was well behind the front line of men.

He knew the weight of Captain Bill's fist on a nose, and did not want it again to fall on his own.

There was a moment's uneasy hush as men held their breath, looking at Captain Bill. He was cornered, caught, outnumbered twenty to one. The doorway and hallway were jammed with men. The windows, screened with netting, opened out to the top of the veranda.

"I'm one lone, hones' man 'mong a bunch o' thieves," said Captain Bill. Then with a sweeping outreach of his left arm he caught Pleu by the neck and jerked him about. "Get here in front o' me, where you'll be safe! If Simpson shoots at me, he'll be sure to hit somebody else!"

PLEU gurgled in a kind of angry pleading. Cloverland, thrusting out his arm at Simpson, cried—

"Give me that gun!"

Voices yelled in surprised exclamations that Captain Bill was showing fight. Jorks cried—

"Don't shoot!"

But Malloy, who had done some rough and tumble work in his younger days, furtively lifted a whisky bottle from the floor and brought it down on Captain Bill's bushy head. The bottle broke. Bill's knees sagged. He staggered, with a hand groping vaguely toward his eyes.

"He's done for!"

"That got 'im!"

"Good work, Malloy!"

Bill shook his head, and blood came away with the splinters of glass and, stumbling backward, he brought up against the wall where for a moment he gasped dizzily.

He had been half stunned, but he continued to seem half stunned after his head began to clear. He sagged drunkenly and peered from under heavy lids.

"We got 'im!" said Cloverland, coming close and holding Simpson's gun against Bill's breast. "Get somethin' to tie 'im up!"

For the second time that night Bill whipped a hand toward a gun that Cloverland held. This time the gun went off as he struck it, and the bullet popped overhead; and for the second time that night Bill put his weight behind a lump of a fist that went into Cloverland's face, and Cloverland's six feet of fleshy bulk collapsed.

Cries and shouts went up. Captain Bill was angered to the bottom of his fighting heart; and he cut loose like the bull in the Chinaman's shop that he had threatened to be. Pasty Pleu, being nearest and being much detested by Bill, got the second blow and crumpled like a sack of wet salt. Bill swung to right and left. He caught the lanky Simpson who was surging against the crowd in the doorway—those farthest back in a safe position were standing on tiptoe, stubbornly trying to see—and with a heaving fling he threw Simpson bodily halfway across the room. With a backward swing of his left hand, Bill caught Jorks somewhere about the head and sent him sprawling. Then he upended the poker table, scattering cards and coins, as he made a flying jump for Malloy.

And he caught Malloy, whose soft, frantic fists beat at his face. Blood showered from Captain Bill, but there was an ugly grin on his sun blackened face as he caught the planter at the back of his head and smashed once, then again, with knuckles hard as old cowhide. He flung Malloy away; and at that moment a second shot roared and a puff of smoke swirled across the room.

The ghostly clerk, Jim, had picked up the gun that had fallen from Cloverland's hand.

"Drop that, you!" Bill shouted, whirling about as Jim's arm wavered in a trembling effort to sight again.

Bill scooped an overturned chair off the floor and, with an upward fling, sent it crashing at Jim, knocking him over, though the gun went off again as he fell.

Captain Bill was a rough-and-tumble fighter, powerful and confident. He would no more think of using a gun against men with whom he had a money quarrel than of putting poison into a fellow's coffee because he didn't like his looks. He already had the first gun he had taken from Cloverland in his pocket, and no more thought of using it than a bull would have thought of using something other than his horns. Now he dropped to get hold of the gun Jim had let fall. Knees and elbow to the floor, he got it and, without rising, half turned and flung it out of a window, through the netting.

The next moment there was a scrambling surge of men on top of him. Some of the planters, who had come up with Cloverland and Simpson and seen their friends banged about, landed on Bill, perhaps partly tempted by seeing him down. Then it was a cat fight, many on one, with throaty yelps, hoarse breathing, flurry and flail of arms, a scattering of blood over white suits, not all of it from Bill's cut head.

Bill came out of the mixup, rising with the weight of two men on his back. With claw and pull, and backward jab of fists, he shook them off, kicked at them and turned to see who next wanted a bit of fist pudding—and looked squarely into a double barreled shotgun that had been hastily brought up from Cloverland's room.

"Give over!" shouted the planter who held it.

"Go to hell!" said Bill, and with a sidelong jump he lunged at a window, going head first and landing out on top of the veranda.

The planter did not shoot. He was not a murderer. He unwillingly half admired a man who would dodge a leveled shotgun; but a chorus of protesting yelps rose.

"Shoot!"

"Kill 'im!"

"Get 'im!"

"Don't let him get away!"

"Good Lord, what a man!" said the planter, hanging on to the gun as other fellows who had no such scruples pulled at it, wanting to fire at Bill.

Men lay groaning and unconscious all about the room as if there had been a massacre; all furniture was overturned and broken; blood was splattered as if the room had been sloshed with red paint.

Bill landed on the veranda roof with much the same sort of dive that he would have used in going overboard into water. He grunted heavily as he struck, the breath half knocked out of him. With a quick scramble he got to the edge of the veranda, lowered his feet over, slid and hung for a moment dangling before he took the fifteen foot drop to the ground below.

His clothes were torn to rags. His broad shoulders had ripped the back of the coat as a cicada splits its shell. He was smeared with blood. Excited women who had hovered below, terrified by the thumping and bumping, shooting and yells overhead, screamed at sight of him.

Then as he hung there a second or two, silhouetted against the bright gleam of dangling lanterns, a woman's screaming shout from what seemed far off in the darkness called to him.

He knew the voice. It was Jeanne Malloy's.

Captain Bill dropped. He rose, stumbled, heard her call again, and set off half blindly on the run. Then from the window overhead came a *boom—boom!* as somebody who had wrenched the shotgun from the planter fired. Lead splattered all about, cutting the leaves, and the sting of the birdshot made Bill jump. He clapped his hand to the revolver that weighted his deep pocket, stopped, turned and shot twice vaguely into the air.

Men cried out and women screamed at the sound of those shots. A lot of people thought they heard the bullets whiz right past their heads.

Ahead of him on the graveled roadway Bill saw in the vague light a carriage with horses that jumped nervously, snorting and striking the gravel with restless hoofs. There was a creak and rattle of harness. The girl stood up, holding the reins; and a native groom whom she had cajoled or bribed stood at the horses' heads, holding their bridles.

"Captain Bill? Captain Bill! Quick! Get up here! Are you hurt?"

"I been havin' a good time!" said Bill.

TO BE CONTINUED

Statement of the ownership, management, circulation, etc., required by the Act of Congress of August 24, 1912, of *Adventure* published twice a month at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1932. State of New York, county of New York, ss. Before me, a Notary Public in and for the State and county aforesaid, personally appeared FRED LEWIS, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the Treasurer of THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, publisher of *Adventure*, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of August 24, 1912, embodied in section 411, Postal Laws and Regulations, printed on the reverse of this form, to wit: 1. That the names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City. Editor, A. A. PROCTOR, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City. Managing Editor, VICTOR WEYBRIGHT, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City. Business Managers, None. 2. That the owner is: THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING COMPANY, a corporation, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City, whose stockholder is: THE BUTTERICK COMPANY, a corporation, 161 Sixth Avenue, New York City, whose stockholders are: J. S. BACHE & Co., 42 Broadway, New York City, JOHN P. BOYLE, c/o MOORE & SCHLEY, 100 Broadway, New York City, EFFIE PHELPS HOOVER, RAY PHELPS HOOVER and HOWARD EARL HOOVER, executors of the estate of FRANK K. HOOVER, dec'd., Trust No. 1004, First Union Trust & Savings Bank, Dearborn & Monroe Sts., Chicago, Ill., JOHN J. JOHNSON, c/o Continental Illinois Bank & Trust Co., Chicago, Ill. STANLEY R. LATSHAW, Butterick Building, 161 Sixth Ave., New York City., MERRICK & Co., c/o CUSTOMERS SECURITIES DEPT., THE NEW YORK TRUST CO., 100 Broadway, New York City., MOORE & SCHLEY, 100 Broadway, New York City, JOS. A. MOORE, 300 Park Avenue, New York City, SAMUEL SCHWARTZ, 18 Renner Avenue, Newark, N. J., SHEARSON HAMMILL & Co., 71 Broadway, New York City, WEBB WALKER, Medical Arts Building, Ft. Worth, Texas, WARWICK CORP. 910 So. Michigan Ave., Room 504, Chicago, Ill., C. E. WELLES & Co., 39 Broadway, New York City. 3. That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: THE BOWERY SAVINGS BANK, 110 East 42nd Street, New York City (Holder of Mortgage on real property). 4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. FRED LEWIS, Treasurer. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 22nd day of September, 1932. CHAPPELL CORY, JR. Notary Public, New York County Clerk's No. 206, Reg. No. 4-C-139. (My commission expires Mar. 30, 1934. [*Seal*]—Form 3526.—Ed. 1924.)

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

WILD BILL HICKOK to the contrary notwithstanding, those "little pea-shooters" could penetrate. A note on early cartridge guns:

Washington, D. C.

The "Saga of the Sixshooter" is astonishingly accurate, considering that the writer must dig out his facts from musty records. Mr. Freeman's success is remarkable. As I have some first-hand information, it may prove of interest.

Rollin White stayed at my home in Washington the winter he tried to get the term of his patent for the bored-through cylinder extended. He gave my uncle the *first revolver made on that pattern*, a .22 seven-shot. As my unk was a parson and like Mulholland in Kip's poem, "needed no knife nor pistil and never took no harm" in preaching the Gospel, he gave the little gun to me. Bill Hickok's deprecatory comment about the gun was unjustified. It penetrated an inch and a half of seasoned oak at 40 yards, tearing off slivers ten inches long from the back. But it was dangerous to the user, as there was no trigger-guard (the trigger was set not quite flush in a lug on the frame) and no half-cock notch, so the hammer could lift and drop by accident, as it once did.

William C. Dodge was my father-in-law. The Russian model gun, .44, of Smith and Wesson, *No. 1 of the issue*, was sent to him for a patent application. As he had many weapons, he gave it to me. It had a 6½" barrel and is a terrible weapon, entirely safe. Alas! A Philistine of a moving man stole both of the guns. I intended to send them to the War Department Museum. Hickok could not criticize the .44. It was quite common to use the Colt .45 shell, but the full-size S. & W. was less apt to "spit."

—T. J. JOHNSTON

WHAT is the largest land animal extant? A reader's tentative list of some that belong up near the top of the list by reason of bulk:

U. S. Geographical Survey,
Washington, D. C.

What is the second largest (heaviest) land animal in the world?

Inquiry of a number of scientific institutions as well as sportsmen has developed simply a controversy. Is it the rhino or the hippo? As we are rapidly approaching the date of complete

extinction of the white rhinocerous, may not a succeeding generation face the astounding fact that in all preceding historic time this question of what was our second greatest animal was never settled? Also what is the third, and the fourth, and the fifth? The *testimony* is conflicting, resolving itself into a surprising amount of academic guessing.

The following is the writer's guess as to the order of weight of the eleven largest animals. Perhaps the twelfth is bigger than some of the others.

1. Elephant
2. White Rhinocerous
3. Hippo
4. Bison
5. Buffalo
6. Bear (Alaska)
7. Giraffe
8. Black rhino
9. Eland
10. Moose
11. Elk
12. .....?

It is somewhat astonishing to the ordinary lay reader to find the tusks and horns of the game animals weighed and measured down to fractions of inches and ounces while little or nothing is recorded about the size of the animals carrying them.

—GUY E. MITCHELL

ERRONEOUSLY, in a Camp-fire caption in the October 15th issue, the motto on the shield of the O'Sullivan family was attributed to the Irish coat-of-arms. Our thanks to Comrade O'Sullivan and others who pointed out the slip:

Pawtucket, Rhode Island

In Camp-fire of the October 15th issue of *Adventure*, Mr. Sylvester Sullivan questions a Gaelic translation previously submitted by me and gives us his version of it.

I offer as authority for the translation a booklet by W. S. W. Anson, entitled "Mottoes and Badges", New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., as follows:

"Lamh Laidir an Uachdar", The strong hand uppermost. [O'Brien family.] "Lamh Dhearg Eirin", The red hand of Eirin. [O'Neill family.] "Lamh Foistinneach an Uachdar", The gentle hand uppermost. [O'Sullivan family.]

While I do not take issue with Mr. Sullivan, I believe there must be some reader of this magazine who can put us right on this matter.

I do call to task *Adventure*, for the caption on Mr. Sullivan's article, which caption reads: The motto on the shield of Erin. It should have read motto on shield of O'Sullivan family, although its proud possessors have proved it worthy, many times, of that honor.

—DONALD O'SULLIVAN

Another translation:

Saugus, Massachusetts

Maybe I may be able to help in this controversy, about the Gaelic quotation mentioned in the October 15th issue of *Adventure* (in Camp-fire).

I think both contributors are wrong. "Lamh Foistinneach an Uachdar" means literally: "What we gain by conquest we retain by clemency." I came across this somewhere or other, perhaps "Burke's Peerage" or "Irish Pedigrees" in the public library.

—CECIL P. DUFFY

A LETTER from Georges Surdez, of our Writers' Brigade:

Brooklyn, New York

Some months ago *Adventure* published my article, "Desert Ambush," a narration of the tragic end of General Clavery, ambushed and slain by Saharan raiders in the Occidental Desert. I have received a copy of *La Revue Des Vivants*, sent me by Monsieur Edouard Clavery, a brother of the officer. He writes that he is satisfied that I gave credit where it was due. However, he points to a letter of his included in the French publication, in which he corrects certain statements made by Monsieur J. Gasser in an article on the same topic which appeared in the magazine in another issue. In all justice, he has a right to his beliefs, and there is interest in what he offers.

Like M. J. Gasser, like the majority of the specialized writers of North Africa, I wrote that General Clavery had been somewhat rash. As it happened, I did not base myself on other writers, but on what I heard in the Sahara. Also, I made it clear that General Clavery could not be wholly blamed, that he had an example of confidence to give, that he would have been blamed for caution quite as severely as for audacity.

QUOTING from M. Clavery's letter:

"The riders of the auxiliary native forces, *mokhrazenia*, sent from Menou-Arar, had been placed on guard at the Pass of the Jebel Arlal for the security of the Territorial Commander and his mission. It is impossible that these natives could have been altogether ignorant of the reason for their assignment, for their mission concerned a man who was, after all, the 'big chief' of the region. But not only did the seven or eight riders leave on the evening of December 7th (1928) before General Clavery had passed by them on his way north, but this very detachment, which was comprised in the Béchar command, was *that same night* replaced or, to be more exact, *relieved* by bandits from the west; people later proved by a private investigation to have belonged to the Doui Menia and Ait tribes, or rather, as M. J. Gasser seems to state with reason, to the Ouled Hammous. It so happens that by an unexpected coincidence those same tribes supply the recruits for the auxiliary forces of Menou-Arar. Therefore, a genuine *treason* is involved.

"The conniving of our auxiliaries with the raiders is thus proved, demonstrated in a fashion that is unfortunately obvious, and the so-called 'rashness' of the general disproved."

I DON'T know what fact Monsieur Clavery has to back this accusation. I was down in the Sahara several times after that tragic episode, heard hundreds of yarns, but no one ever voiced suspicion of the auxiliaries. As a matter of fact, nine months after the attack, riders were pointed

out to me on crests near the Béchar-Beni-Abbès trail, on "protection" duty. And I was informed that they were the chaps who had gone back to Menou Arar from the Jebel Arlal at the time of the ambush, because they lacked water and their horses were spent. Tribes are often split in allegiance, fractions remaining independent, fractions yielding to the French and supplying them with auxiliaries. And when I voiced astonishment, I was told that the loyalty of those natives, their devotion to French officers, was beyond question. It is a tradition of their race to earn the pay they accept, regardless of tribal or family connections. I am inclined to believe this. Everywhere in North Africa, French troops use native guides. Had such guides showed themselves treacherous this would not be the case. An exception is possible, but would be extraordinary.

ANOTHER quotation from Monsieur Clavery: "Twice M. J. Gasser points out that one of the Ait or Ouled Hammou raiders was left on the ground. However, by a fortuitous omission, doubtless, the part played by the general's son is not reported. In fact, it was one of the bullets of the youthful non-commissioned officer, fired at two hundred meters, which dropped one of the raiders, later identified as the general's murderer."

I stand clear of that error. The survivors gave me my information, and I wrote: "He (young Clavery) leaped out, firing as he moved, and that first shot dropped one of the fleeing raiders."

Monsieur Clavery adds an item of which I never heard in the desert: "As Sergeant Clavery was able to note while inspecting the field at dawn of the following morning, the man he had dropped at four o'clock, El Kabbash, was none other than the chieftain of the raiding band and the murderer of his father, the general. The skill and courage of the young non-commissioned officer in thus punishing the crime sensibly changed the face of things, and prevented the cowardly ambush . . . from becoming a triumph for the assassins. Otherwise, in fact, El Kabbash, going back among his tribe, would have been greeted by a general ovation, by all sorts of joyous manifestations, as the killer of the Territorial Commander."

—GEORGES SURDEZ

TOURING the country in economical fashion. Major Percival's figures (August 15th issue) based on rates before the new gas and oil taxes, were slightly lower than those in the following:

Evanston, Illinois

My brother and I have just completed a thirty-day trip through the West covering seven thousand miles. It has been, therefore, very interesting to compare the estimate of Major Percival for such a trip, as given in the August 15th issue, with the actual figures of our own limited expedition.

Our car was a practically new 1931 Ford convertible coupé. We changed oil every thousand miles and had the car completely greased every two thousand. Our gasoline mileage averaged 19.25 at an average cost per gallon of 25.1 cents. Had we stayed east of the Rockies the latter figure would have been appreciably less. Our cost per thousand miles for the car was, therefore, $15.40.

HALF of our lodgings were spent in overnight cabins, the other half in the free camping grounds in national parks. The cabins averaged $1.09 per night. In our experience there are abundant cabins in all sections of the country at a dollar a night, for the whole cabin. It is, however, essential to take one's own bedding and pillows. Cabin charges are usually double where bedding is furnished. We have never found a cabin camp where allowance was not made for our having our own blankets.

Practically without exception the cabins which we occupied contained cooking accommodations. It is therefore altogether practical to prepare two meals a day with great convenience. Luncheon, of course, offers a problem, since it is difficult to find places to cook along the road. We cooked our own meals only when camped in the parks and restaurant prices in the concessions seemed exorbitant, a comparatively rare condition. Nevertheless, for the two of us, our meals averaged only $2.60 a day.

Incidentals of all kinds averaged only 56 cents a day. Our total expense, therefore, averaged: the car, per thousand miles . . . $15.40. Meals, lodging and incidentals . . . $4.25 (figuring cabins every night) per day.

—ALLEN D. ALBERT, JR.

OTHER evidence besides the following news clipping seems to indicate that various foods were being tinned in the days of the California gold rush. Mr. Fiske pointed out that it was not till some years later that the process for condensing milk was invented:

Baltimore, Maryland

In reading the Camp-fire in your October 1st issue I notice the polite criticism of Mr. Harvey E. Fiske of Gordon Young's story, "The Gambler". At the time I was much impressed with Mr. Fiske's criticism, inasmuch as any man to perceive such a discrepancy must have a mind of the keenest.

For your information and for argument's sake I enclose a clipping from the *Baltimore News*, which reads as follows:

HAS FOOD CANNED IN 1805

SUNNYSIDE, WASH.:—Some day, Mrs. Josephine Henderson said, she is going to open a can of milk and the can of beans put up in Scotland in 1805. The cans, brought around the Horn by William Henderson a century and a quarter ago, seem to be in perfect condition, but Mrs. Henderson is curious to see how the contents kept.

This may just be some newspaper bunkum, but if you should care to use the enclosed, you are entirely welcome.

—E. WALTON BREWINGTON, JR.

Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Malay Milkman

IF YOU decide to keep your own cow, he may give your head boy a half dollar to give the cow tender a quarter to give the grass cutter ten cents to mix bamboo stem hairs in with the fodder—the sort of racket which ought to make us feel at home in Kuala Lumpur, but doesn't.

Request:—"My husband may be offered a job in the jungle some thirty miles out of Kuala Lumpur, F.M.S., and naturally I want to go along. If he goes, it will probably be in December of this year and I am inconsiderate enough to be expecting a baby in April. I was out in K. L. this spring, and find that the climate agrees with me all right, but suspect that it is not too good for young infants. Also, I don't know anything about doctors and hospital accommodations in Malaya. Do you? I suppose there's no such thing as fresh milk any closer than Singapore, though it seems easy to get English tinned milk there."

—MRS. HELEN C. S——, Laguna Beach, California

Reply, by Mr. Gordon MacCreagh:—Baby raising is, I am positive, quite a new one for Ask Adventure.

Now what d'you suppose I—a roving bachelor in the days when I knew the Malay States, though my fate has descended upon me since—should know about the health of babies in them there jungles?

I can tell you only this: Babies *are* born of white folks and seem to survive there. You have been in Kuala Lumpur; so you know that there is quite a community of white folks there. They eat and drink (plenty) and live and marry and are given in marriage; and some of them aren't rich enough to rush off to Europe each time that babies intrude upon their peace of mind.

Kuala Lumpur has excellent hospital accommodation in charge of a government civil surgeon. Singapore, not so far away, has more.

As to milk. It isn't difficult. If you don't believe the advertisements and you *must* have fresh milk, you buy a cow and keep it in your own compound. *Buy* it; don't rent it from the local milkman; nor have him bring it every morning and milk it in your compound. 'Cause the milkman's religion and heredity insist that he mix at least fifty per cent drain water with the milk that you pay for; and he will somehow, someway, contrive to put it in. No white woman ever yet bought whole milk in any tropical country. Buy your cow—and then the little half pint of thin blue milk that you can extract from it will appall you—till you learn that your head boy has got up long before you did and milked the cow while you blissfully slept. You will learn, too, that the quality of the milk is accounted for by the fact that the head boy sells the good fodder that you buy for it and feeds it stable straw instead, which is cheaper though not so healthful.

And if you believe in the American obsession of sanitation untouched by hand, stand by with a heavy whip and see to it that your cow milker washes his hands *in your presence* with clean water; for an Oriental objects to unnecessary washings with the same intensity as any small boy.

And if you have read literature about the inad-

visability of discontented cows and about all the diseases that they go out and find among the innocent buttercups, get the local civil surgeon to inspect your cow. He is used to such requests from particular women who are having their first baby in the Orient. By the time they have their second they have gotten over all those inhibitions born of a sheltered and sanitated land.

Above all things, buy a *cheap* cow. For you will be buying many of them. Cows that live to decrepit old age in the incredibly filthy native byres die of mysterious ailments in the possession of white folks—and all the servants mass together and swear that they know nothing about it, although the milkman, defrauded of your custom, gave the head boy half a dollar to give the cow tender a quarter to give the grass cutter ten cents to mix bamboo stem hairs in with the fodder.

My own reaction to those parts is: that though I went there when I was young and husky and full of enthusiasm and still capable of being molded to the hidebound social conventions of the wretched people marooned there for their lives; though I spent only six years there, it was seven years too long.

Do you know what Kipling wrote—speaking of India, but the same applies to all the Orient?

"— grim stepmother of our kind.
If a year of life be lent her; if her portals
once we enter,
The door is shut. We may not look behind."

P.S.—From Laguna Beach, California, to Kuala Lumpur, Federated Malay States! But what the heck? Lucifer was heaved out of heaven and lived!

Fish Bait

FRESH hellgrammites for the discouraged angler.

Request:—"I use hellgrammites for bass fishing, and have great difficulty in keeping them. They kill each other. I would appreciate any help you could give me on keeping them."

—A. J. HUTCHISON, Hudson, New York

Reply, by Mr. John B. Thompson:—This will help: Layer of moss, layer black muck, layer of green leaves; about 3 separate sections of this and you will find it great help in keeping hellgrammites. Of course, moisten.

Nevada

DON'T homestead, unless you plan to raise rattlesnakes and horned toads.

Request:—"Are there any available homestead lands in Nevada?"

—C. THURLOW, Bakersfield, California

Reply, by Mr. F. W. Egelston:—While approximately 80 per cent of the area of the State of Nevada is unappropriated public land, none of it is suitable for homesteading unless you have in mind raising horned toads or rattlesnakes. This land is either desert or mountainous; all of it is arid. In fact, there is no homestead land left anywhere in the United States that is suitable for farming.

Diet

IRON rations costing a few cents a day.

Request:—"Inasmuch as I will shortly be entirely broke, will you kindly suggest a very cheap but adequately nourishing ration which I can carry along or purchase on the way as I travel West. I have in mind a sort of 'iron ration' of about two items which, however monotonous it may become, will nevertheless keep me in good health and strength indefinitely."

—PAUL R. PALMER, New York City

Reply, by Dr. Claude P. Fordyce:—I know a man in the best of physical health who works hard and lives wholly on graham crackers and milk. I would add to that raisins. Such a diet will keep you going, as I have tried it out on a hard hike trip into the wilderness. I used powdered milk, but would suggest the small tins of evaporated cream which can be secured anywhere, and you can always carry a small supply.

Kephart recommends what he calls "pinole" as being the best all-round ration. It consists, he says, of Indian corn parched and reduced to a powder. Common rolled oats browned in a pan in an oven and run through a spice mill is as good. A coffee mill will do if you have it available, but set it fine. In use mix about five tablespoonsful in a cup of water and drink it.

The best feature of the above rations aside from their strength sustaining powers and good portability and keeping qualities is that they need not have a stove to cook before eating.

Urga

CITY of the Siberian tundra, where the nomad tribes seek refuge from the gales.

Request:—"Some years ago my brother went to Urga. After several months he was reported killed by some natives. Would you kindly give me an idea of what the place is like?

I hope after the present disturbances to go over there; not to stay, however, but to get more data on his death."

—HERBERT MOLSON, Cañon City, Colorado

Reply, by Dr. Neville Whymant:—Urga is in Siberia. It is now in one of the autonomous republics owing allegiance to Soviet Russia. It is a typical Siberian city, heavily built to withstand the gales from the north, and surrounded by endless stretches of tundra—bleak, flat marshes with little or no vegetation. The tribes—apart, of course, from Russians, Chinese and Mongols—are mainly Siberian nomads, Yakuts, Tungus, Koryaks and mixed Cheremiss tribes. Each tribe speaks its own language, which bears the same name as the tribe, and these nomads are dressed principally in rough riding kit made

of cord cloth and animal skins. In Summer lighter clothes of the Chinese type are worn but, as the Winter lasts most of the year, furs are pretty general, with earmuffs and nose-protectors to guard against the severe frosts (sometimes 30° below zero for weeks on end). These nomads are mainly nature worshipers or Shamanists. Many of them practise a debased form of Buddhism brought into the territory by Mongolian lamas.

If you think of going out there you must first get a visa from the Soviet authorities or you may be refused permission to cross the frontier.

Canada

GEORGIAN BAY and the old lumber country.

Request:—"My sons want to go up to the French River just off Georgian Bay. Are the lumber mills running? Do they still fish off Bustard Lights for sturgeon?"

—MRS. KATHLEEN KLEIN, Los Angeles, California

Reply, by A. D. L. Robinson:—It is some years since I was as far north as French River, and conditions are much changed since then, I know; for one thing, the lumber is pretty well skinned out now, and what lumbering could be done is at a standstill owing to the poor market for lumber. Indeed, only about one-third of the lumbering that was done formerly is done now. So it would be really misleading to try to entice your sons here—provided the Immigration officials would let you all come in now—to offer inducements in the lumbering trade. Whenever it is stated in the Press here that lumbering in such and such a district is about to recommence, hundreds of unemployed men flock to that district, thus glutting the employment situation.

Fishing for sturgeon is still done, but not just off the Bustard Lights, for sturgeon change their feeding and breeding grounds so much that fishermen fish everywhere in the Georgian Bay for them. They are becoming scarcer and ever scarcer, though fishing, generally speaking, is still carried on in the Bay with fairly good results. On the islands known as the Minks, about halfway between Parry Sound and Point Au Baril, is a colony of fishermen who fish the year round, and make their living thereby.

"Blood On The Saddle"

A COWBOY song which was used in the play, "Green Grow The Lilacs."

Request:—"I would like to obtain a copy of 'Blood On The Saddle.'"

—JOHN POLYAKOVICS, New York City

Reply, by Mr. R. W. Gordon:—The words for "Blood on the Saddle" so far as I know them are:

"And there was blood on the saddle,
And blood all around
And a great, big puddle
Of blood on the ground.

"And a cowboy lay in it
All bloody and red.
For his bronco done throwed him
And mashed in his head."

This song was used in the play, "Green Grow the Lilacs", but is not contained in any of the better known cowboy collections.

Army And Navy

OFFICERS of each in order of precedence.

Request:—"I should appreciate a list of the ranks of commissioned Army officers, with the corresponding ranks in the Navy."

—CARL SCHOENBERG, St. Louis, Missouri

Reply, by Capt. Glen R. Townsend:—

General of the Armies	—Admiral of the Navy
General	—Admiral
Lieutenant-General	—Vice-Admiral
Major-General	—Rear-Admiral
Brigadier-General	—Rear-Admiral
Colonel	—Captain
Lieutenant-Colonel	—Commander
Major	—Lieutenant-Commander
Captain	—Lieutenant
First Lieutenant	—Lieutenant, Junior grade
Second Lieutenant	—Ensign

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Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to this magazine. Be definite; explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The expert will in all cases answer to the best of his ability, but neither he nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing or for employment. Ask Adventure covers outdoor opportunities, but only in the way of general advice.

A complete list of the "Ask Adventure" experts appears in the issue of the fifteenth of each month

THE TRAIL AHEAD—THE NEXT ISSUE OF *ADVENTURE*, DECEMBER 15th

Old Sugar-Foot

By PETER B. KYNE

PRIVATE KELLY the Match abandoned his outpost because he said he was afraid of starting a war. The grand old man, his captain, felt that Kelly did not need a court-martial as much as he did experience. So the captain took him on a little unofficial war of his own. Look for this rollicking tale of old Philippine days!

And These Other Good Stories

THE PARIAH, a story of one of the ill-omened sons of the sea, by BILL ADAMS; THE $5000 SLADE, a story of a Western feud, by FOSTER-HARRIS; PART II of SCALAWAG, a novel of the South Sea Islands, by GORDON YOUNG; EXTRA FARE, a story of the railroad men, by WILLIAM EDWARD HAYES; THREE SCORE AND TWENTY, a story of the Southern backwoods, by HOWARD ELLIS DAVIS; and the conclusion of THE BROAD ARROW, a novel of the bushrangers of pioneer Australia, by WILLIAM MACLEOD RAINE.

"Chic" Sale

tells about
the REFORM of

Aunt Emmy's Husband

And I would say, jest offhand, there ain't a happier couple in forty mile.

"Chic" Sale

AUNT EMMY was born in the spring of 1890, makin' her thirty-five year old this comin' Halloween. She has a fascinatin' personality and irresistible smile, and yet there come a time when her husband lost his temper. One day he got so mad at her that she hit him with a vacuum cleaner and sent him back to his old man.

Repentin' in a moment of weakness, she admitted him to the house again. Well sir, in spite of the interested neighbors, it worked out all right, and I'll tell you why. When her husband gits quarrelsome now Aunt Emmy feeds him a couple of little chocolate tablets.

Many a good soul gets a reputation for being a grouch —when something else is to blame for it. You can't expect an "irresistible smile" in a person whose system is clogged with intestinal poisons.

The poisons of constipation will poison dispositions as well as bodies.

Those "little chocolate tablets"—called Ex-Lax —are the pleasant, modern way of cleaning the intestines of poison-laden waste.

Ex-Lax is so delightful to take that children just l-o-v-e it. It's safe, gentle and effective for young and old. Ask your doctor.

Your druggist not only sells Ex-Lax—he recommends it! 10c, 25c, 50c, or mail the coupon below for a free sample.

Keep "regular" with

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The Chocolated Laxative

FREE SAMPLE OF EX-LAX

*Name*_____

*Address*_____

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Mail this coupon to Ex-Lax, Inc., P. O. Box 170, Times-Plaza Station, Brooklyn, N. Y. (Y122)

"Nature in the Raw is seldom MILD"

THE KING OF BEASTS

"Nature in the Raw"—as portrayed by the great animal painter, Paul Bransom ...inspired by the brute force and savage cunning which has made the lion ruler of the African jungle.

—and raw tobaccos have no place in cigarettes

They are *not* present in Luckies
. . . the *mildest* cigarette
you ever smoked

WE buy the finest, the very finest tobaccos in all the world—but that does not explain why folks everywhere regard Lucky Strike as the mildest cigarette. The fact is, we never overlook the truth that "Nature in the Raw is Seldom Mild"—so these fine tobaccos, after proper aging and mellowing, are then given the benefit of that Lucky Strike purifying process, described by the words—"It's toasted". That's why folks in every city, town and hamlet say that Luckies are such mild cigarettes.

"It's toasted"
That package of mild Luckies

Copr., 1932, The American Tobacco Co.

"If a man write a better book, preach a better sermon, or make a better mouse-trap than his neighbor, tho he build his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door."—RALPH WALDO EMERSON. Does not this explain the world-wide acceptance and approval of Lucky Strike?